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PlayStation 2





Letter from the Editor

44

Games for everyone!

Ever wonder what life would be like without video games? For many it's a stark reality. People actually go through life without ever touching a Final Fantasy, Ico, Stranger's Wrath, Metal Gear, Halo, RE4 or any number of inspiring interactive experiences...and they need our help; it's up to us to save them. Because you just know they're watching sitcoms instead, which softens their brains, and then when we get behind them in traffic or when the light changes they take five seconds to accelerate...it's pretty much an epidemic. With gaming becoming more accessible than ever, how do we get these "non-gamers," these "resisters," to cross over and finally take the plunge into any number of compatible genres? For one, they need help with the controller; ever see a non-gamer hold a controller? It's not pretty. But we can create classes for this, which will create jobs and stimulate the economy. Next, we need to enlighten them on why people the same age that play video games look and act so much younger. Where a 30-something non-gamer is probably sporting Dockers with a tucked in polo shirt (we all know one) a 30-something gamer is likely wearing Diesel or Mark Ecko with a happening baggy "T." Ever notice that at most urban "functions," the "men" are always talking about how they navigated there or the one movie they couldn't drag you to see? These are the guys that Microsoft and Sony want in the loop in the new console world order that's just over the horizon... So, how will they do it? Here are some ideas:

For one, we need more marquee creator/directors and an Oscar-caliber awards show on HBO, Fox or, at the very least, the WB (it worked for *Buffy*) that aren't hosted by anyone who would follow Carrot Top on *Letterman*. We have stars real and virtual, we have pro athletes and we have top music talent...so why are we still broadcasting from the basement with a ham radio? Joe average sees Spielberg on the marquee and his butt's in the seat, so why do we have so few names on game cases? Besides Hideo Kojima, Tim Schafer and a few others I'm drawing a blank. Often times (well, most times) the developer doesn't even have a logo on the box, so step one, we need to solicit our best and brightest. The publishers say directors' or creators' names on the

boxes cheapens the brand...er, yeah, good one. We really know that it makes them less expendable, if they get too demanding, asking for crazy things like some time off, or a guy to capture some decent screens for Play magazine. So we need to fix that.

Then we need an awards show where select members of the enthusiast video game press, as part of a committee of industry professionals (consisting solely of people that play games for a living) nominate and select winners from properly propagated genres. The Spike TV Awards and G-Phoria are sensational and look great on cable with the hip-hop and the b-listers, but we need the real deal. Ever see Kojima, Miyamoto or Itagaki on the red carpet? Ever see a remote from Japan or the UK? Ever see any tributes to the great games of yesteryear? I'll happily produce. Anyway, we need to fix that too. And we need either unions or our own SAG, an academy, whatever...some due-collecting body that protects and serves the development community, which get bounced around like ping-pong balls behind the scenes. Hazard pay for studios making movie games would be nice too.

But what we really, seriously, must do to get non-gamers to play video games is to either make games that would really and truly suck to the rest of us and/or wipe their memories clean and implant new, cooler childhoods, because, let's face it, these people don't play video games because they really do care about traffic on the 405 going south on a Saturday more than whether or not Kameo will make the 360 launch. And they like their Dockers and their wine and whatever else they're into...designer cheeses or whatever.

Who are we kidding? The day my mom and dad start playing games is the day I pick the guitar back up and put new plugs in the Quad. "We're not just game machines anymore..." Okay smarty-pants, then let's see you market your box without them. Gaming online is cool, live chat is cool, episodic games are cool, but your mom playing bridge while chatting about minivans on your Xbox 360 or PS3 is *not cool*. Just wanted to put that out there. What do you think?

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play magazine staff

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The Back of the Book

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Mod squad

Out of all the magazines out there for video games, I chose Play because of how in-depth, and how true you guys are to gamers. You guys always dig deep to get to the real essence of it all.

Hence, I was a little disappointed when I read your Ink article "It's a Cover-Up" in the July 2005 issue. Rather than really looking out for the truth, you guys basically echoed what was said by the web-likes of [various sites].

Tecmo sued Ninjahacker for exploiting some hacks and creating some rather "interesting" skin mods. The nudity aspect wasn't even 10 percent of what mods were out there. Many were creative (and copyright infringement) skin mods! Suddenly, we're able to play as Morrigan from Darkstalkers, Ulala from Space Channel 5, McGee's Alice, T800, and even the Wal-Mart mascot and Britney Spears! There were also several unique character skins built within the limits of the models and geometry. DOA Central has a gallery of images featuring these awesome creative mods.

You can't get that kind of creativity from a production standpoint. There's no way any publisher could get that many licenses without breaking the bank. It's "Illegal Art," so to speak. There's a website dedicated to this sort of stuff, and a lot of it is very creative and cool.

It's not wrong to defend what's yours, but Tecmo's approach was very wrong. One of the aspects of the mods was an actual copy of the game was required. This isn't direct competition with Tecmo. Ninjahacker never gave away free copies or illegal downloads. Many a poster on the forum even stated that they were buying these games just for the mods. So these mods essentially promoted and helped sell Tecmo games. Tecmo has effectively slapped all their fans in the face for trying to make their game more fun to play.

Tecmo also victimizes themselves saying "defamation of character." I don't know where to put this other than in a grey area. I mean, look at their commercials! "She kicks high" kind of gets a certain message across. They even released a Kasumi "bosom mouse pad!" Defamation of character indeed! Of course, more debates of it can be found in the Xbox-scene forums. Cypher himself even posted there. I doubt he has posted since though. He was sort of vowed to silence

on the matter.

So what would have happened to the modding community if Tecmo had won? modthesims.com would cease to exist. No more Half-Life mods (Counterstrike was born FROM mods!). No more Halo mods. No more any mods.

I bought my PlayStation 2 because of DOA 2 Hardcore. My first Xbox game was DOA3. Because of this incident, I'm no longer buying any Tecmo games. Sorry Rygar, Kasumi.

Daniel Lam

PC portation

One thing that gets on my nerves more than anything is listening to a PC fanboy complain how a console port of a hit PC game is just a bastardization of its pure

"Tecmo has effectively slapped all their fans in the face for trying to make their game more fun to play."

and angelic PC brethren. I got something for those guys to think about. Given the high cost of pushing the graphical envelope of next-gen games, the 1/10 sales ratio of PC/console games, and the fact that some are doubting how developers will be able to push the graphical envelope and pull a profit on the console market alone, I think it is a safe prophecy that every PC game that can at least somewhat be handled by a controller is going to make its way over to consoles.

I am not being biased against the PC at all. In fact, I have much respect for the platform's open-endedness and versatility. In one way or another, I am sure that the PC flame will be kept alive. I am just pointing out the economic feasibility of the situation. The fact is that any game that pushes your graphics card to the limit will need to find a console audience in order to compensate for development cost.

Another conclusion that I can draw is that, if I am right about the above statements (and I hope that I am not), this will play into Microsoft's advantage. Given the XNA platform and the overall fact that the Xbox 360 hardware is the most compatible with the PC (I think it is safe to make that assumption when looking at the Xbox 360's triple core CPU

vs. the PS3's cell processing unit), their console is going to be the first place for PC developers to port their games to. Like I said before, developers that are working on games that one would not imagine ever coming to a console are going to have to seriously consider porting it over (and who knows, this may also introduce the mouse and keyboard to console gamers). This is going to play right into Microsoft's advantage as well as further drive the PC into a greater depression.

Jeff J.

Childish ways...pfft

Using four-letter words is in no way a childish way. The use of a four-letter word can accentuate a feeling. Nobody that I know would like to hear me tell them

about a game calling it, "an exciting relief of anger, the smooth and subtle way that the programmers put their graphics engine together gives it a subtle hint of daring adventure." Hell no! They want to hear me call it the sweetest F-ing game around. They want to hear that you can rip things a new one, with the bad assist new gadgets and stuff. The usage of these "four-letter words" excites people for the game, you can't say that everything has "two fantastic thumbs up!" What does a fantastic thumb look like? Who cares? But you can say that a game is the shit and that it will blow your mind with the coolest F-ing things in the world.

Zack H.

That you, Spencer?

Man...usually everyone has that one fervent opinion that really makes their blood boil when it's disputed, and it sucks that my favorite gaming magazine had to include that dissenting opinion. I'm a pretty big video game soundtrack fan, and sometimes I download soundtracks to games that I haven't even played based on good word-of-mouth because

I know more talent lies in video game composers than half the garbage on the top 40 put together. My favorite, out of all the amazing, passionate, amazing gaming soundtracks under the sun, is Sonic CD, the American version, which I think completely slaughters the Japanese one. So your comment about wanting Sega to include that ass-tastic Japanese soundtrack made me very, very sad. Like the weeping IM emoticon. That's how upset I was. I realize it's very hard to try to alter someone's musical taste, but really, have you listened to either of them? Try telling anyone you got goosebumps listening to the Stardust Speedway tracks on the Japanese version without lying. I found that the situation wasn't even the American one is better than the Japanese one, but the American one (by Spencer Nilsen by the way, who also did the amazing Ecco: Tides of Time music) is a masterpiece, and the Japanese one is just a joke really! I downloaded the entire Japanese soundtrack and only kept one song; that's how uninteresting it was. I'll let the marionettes finish this rambling mess as I put their lyric into its proper context: America[n Sonic CD soundtrack], f*** yeah!

Love,
David

At least someone's going to be happy with the U.S. Sonic Gems Collection...

Where's my War?

After reading through your previews of E3, there is one game mysteriously missing given its August 22nd tentative release date: Advance Wars: Dual Strike for the DS. Why is that? Every screen shot I've seen so far is still in the original Japanese, and your newest issue offered nothing new on this Holy Grail of a game. I'm very concerned I will have to wait even longer to get my stylus tapping on my virtual handheld army of big-headed soldiers. What's the word, Play?

QOR

Nintendo stopped by with Advance Wars: Dual Strike at the last minute just as we were finishing this issue, and we're pleased to report it's fully in English and very likely to make its August release date.



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XBOX 360 UPDATE

Price and backwards compatibility issues addressed

When Microsoft revealed the Xbox 360 not so long ago, they made a few things perfectly clear: it will be very powerful, it will be online and community-oriented, it will be out before the end of 2005, it will have a global strategy to dominate in parts of the world where the original Xbox didn't. A few major questions were left hanging, however, especially concerning backwards compatibility and price. Those questions have now been answered...at least somewhat.

Microsoft has announced that the 360 will have limited backwards compatibility, meaning that, due to the differing natures of the 360's ATI graphics processor and the Xbox's Nvidia graphics chip, the 360 will not have the innate ability to play Xbox games, but rather will have to emulate them—which will only work for games that have their specific profiles included in the 360's firmware or are downloaded later. As such, the Xbox 360 will launch with the ability to play the biggest titles—Halo 1 & 2, Ninja Gaiden, Conker: Live & Reloaded, Forza Motorsport and others are obvious candidates—but your personal favorite may or may not be initially included. Hopefully future downloadable emulation

profiles won't consume too much hard drive space. The irony of the situation is that Microsoft, which had freed itself from paying royalties to Nvidia due to their hardware co-development with ATI, will again be paying them for the privilege of emulating their chip.

As for the price of the system, Microsoft has made no official statement yet, but in a comment made to financial website TheStreet.com, Microsoft corporate vice president J Allard noted that the 360 would be "in the neighborhood" of the original Xbox's price of \$300. Predictions by financial analysts have helped reinforce this, as they estimate that the Xbox 360 will cost Microsoft \$375 to initially manufacture, forcing Microsoft to take a \$75 loss per unit for the first seven or eight months. Whether this is a smart move by Microsoft is an arguable point, but it's definitely good news for gamers. Hopefully it means that Sony will be forced to hit a reasonable price point with the PlayStation 3, instead of the speculated \$400-500 mark, in order to stay competitive.

Microsoft's tower of power is ready for take off and is backwards compatible...to a degree.

"...the 360 will not have the innate ability to play Xbox games, but rather will have to emulate them..."



BRAIN SCAN

Study of FPS players reveals urge to kill polygons

Yet another video game violence story has made front-page news, this time an amalgamation of rocket and brain science. A German scientist enlisted 13 male gamers aged 18-26 for a few rounds of, based on the game's description, we presume Counter-Strike, while stopped in to an MRI scanner. The scientist observed a shutdown of empathic areas of the brain, inferring—according to this whopping 15-person panel—that gamers' brains become easily focused on killing in a first-person shooter, and that sustained exposure may "train" the brain to stay in this state. Reacting to this more research, Dr. Guy Cumberbatch, head of the UK's Communications Research Group, said: "The notion to punch someone on the nose is pretty basic. I don't think it's influenced in any way by playing these games." He added, "The problem is, it's very much a witch-hunt in relation to video games."

What ever happened to...

Mega Man Anniversary Collection (GBA)

If, by chance, you've been wondering what happened to Mega Man Anniversary Collection on GBA (previously called Mega Man Mania), well, there's good news and bad news. According to the game's producer at Capcom, the reason the game has suffered such lengthy delays (it was due out more than a year ago) is because they've had trouble locating the game's original source code, causing programming difficulties and causing portions of code to be rewritten from scratch. However, the producer stated that the game—which includes the Game Boy versions of Mega Man 1-5—is still coming, although he wouldn't confirm that it was still for GBA. A change of scenery to the DS may be in order.

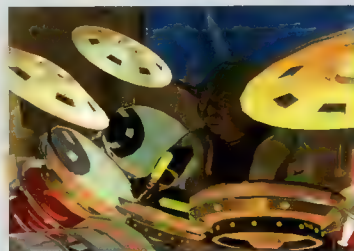


DEATH JAM

An all-star cast for the second season of Video Mods

Regardless of what you think about video game characters performing music videos to the sounds of today's popular tunes—as is the premise of MTV2's *Video Mods*—you have to admit that the choice of games for the second season of the show, which kicked off June 24, is at least fairly cool. Taking the stage in the premiere episode were the characters from Death, Jr. (performing My Chemical Romance's "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)"), Destroy All Humans! (with Sum 41's "Pieces"), Darkwatch (Good Charlotte's "Predictable"), Half-Life 2

(Breaking Benjamin's "So Cold") and the game version of Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith (Franz Ferdinand's "Take Me Out"). In future episodes of the monthly series, you'll get to see characters getting their groove on from games such as Silent Hill (seems wildly inappropriate), Dance Dance Revolution (an admittedly good fit), Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle, Medal of Honor: European Assault (nothing says music video like WWII) and NBA Street V3 (thankfully not NFL Street, lest we get a remix of "Superbowl Shuffle").



BUFFY IN WONDERLAND

Sarah Michelle Gellar starring in Alice adaptation

According to several entertainment industry publications, a movie adaptation of PC game American McGee's *Alice*, published by Electronic Arts, is well underway for Universal Pictures, and starring in the title role as Alice will be none other than Sarah Michelle Gellar of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fame and, more recently, the acclaimed *The Grudge*. (We're trying to forget those *Scooby-Doo* movies.) Like the game, the film version, simply titled *Alice*, is based on the "Alice in Wonderland" books by Lewis Carroll, but features a dark, twisted version of the classic tale in which an adult Alice returns to a warped, violent Wonderland following her parents' deaths in a fire; among other strangeness, the game featured plenty of toys used as weapons and Tweedledee and Tweedledum pulling

miniature versions of themselves out of their stomachs. Joining Gellar on the film will be director Marcus Nispel (known for his 2003 remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). No release date has yet been given for the film. Thankfully, Uwe Boll is not involved in any way.



Any film starring Gellar is a Wonderland in our book.

CAPCOM COLLECTOR'S CONTROLLERS

Wireless Street Fighter pads...and another chainsaw



The Resident Evil 4 chainsaw controller even features a pull-cord that's used to start the game.

We've seen plenty of impressive Street Fighter controllers from Nubytech in the past, but their latest wireless additions to the line are undoubtedly their most exciting yet. Available in four styles—Cammy, Sagat, Blanka and Evil Ryu—each with distinctive color schemes and lenticular artwork by Udon Studios, these new controllers feature cord-free play and the standard six-button configuration ideal for games like Street Fighter Anniversary Collection and Capcom Fighting Evolution. To make the controllers even more

desirable, however, Nuby has gone the extra mile with leather case collectors' edition packaging and character-specific features. The Cammy controller comes with dog tags while the others include key chains; Evil Ryu has extra frames in the lenticular animation; Blanka's controller is tentatively planned to have a cracked appearance with light underneath so bolts of lightning seem to be shooting through it. Each controller also comes with a special-edition comic book detailing the character's history. Limited to a 10,000-unit

production reach each, these controllers are likely to go fast when they're released this summer if the success of the previous SF controllers was any indication. The price will be \$50 a piece.

In addition, Nubytech is also releasing a Resident Evil 4 chainsaw controller for the PlayStation 2 to coincide with the game's release on Sony's system. Similar to the GameCube version but with extra gore and a more authentic reddish-orange color scheme, the controller will retail for \$60 when it's released in October.

database

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Virgin Megastore Top Ten

01	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas rockstar / xb
02	NCAA Football 06 ea / ps2, xb
03	Fantastic Four activision / ps2, xb, gc, pc
04	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down novalogic / ps2, xb
05	Star Wars Episode III lucasarts / ps2, xb, gc, pc
06	Batman Begins ea / ps2, xb, gc
07	Killer 7 capcom / gc, ps2
08	Advent Rising majesco / xb, pc
09	Conker: Live and Reloaded microsoft / xb
10	Psychonauts majesco / xb, pc, ps2



NPD/TRSTS Top Ten May Game Sales

01	Pokémon Emerald nintendo / gba
02	Star Wars Episode III lucasarts / ps2
03	Star Wars Episode III lucasarts / xb
04	Forza Motorsport microsoft / xb
05	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition rockstar / ps2
06	Lego Star Wars eidos / ps2
07	God of War sony / ps2
08	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition rockstar / xb
09	Lego Star Wars eidos / xb
10	Area 51 midway / xb



Your Megastore Beckons!

Fantastic Four

activision / ps2, xb, gc, pc

Straight from the film, they're all here: Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, Human Torch, the Thing... and, of course, Dr. Doom.



NCAA Football 06

ea / ps2, xb

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Star Wars Episode III

lucasarts / ps2, xb, gc, pc

Follow Anakin's journey from the depths of space to the volcanic world of Mustafar...from Jedi chosen one to crispy critter.

Top 5 Now Playing and Reader Selections

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Readers' Most Wanted

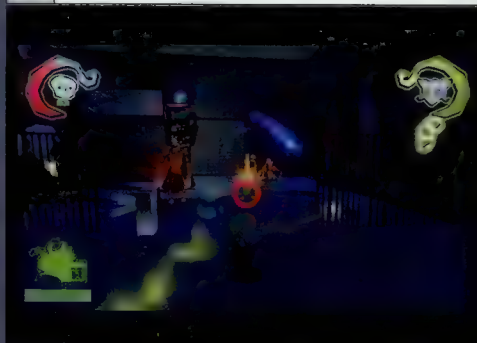
01	Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess nintendo / gc
02	Final Fantasy XII square enix / ps2
03	Death, Jr. konami / psp
04	Kingdom Hearts II square enix / ps2
05	Conker: Live and Reloaded microsoft / xb



Dave Halverson

editor in chief

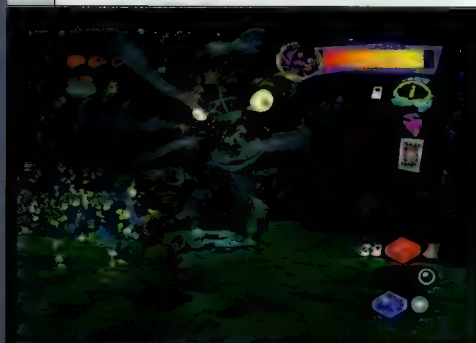
01	Death, Jr. konami / psp
02	Conker: Live and Reloaded microsoft / xb
03	Darkwatch capcom / xb
04	Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves sony / ps2
05	Legend of Kay capcom / ps2



Brady Fiechter

executive editor

01	Psychonauts majesco / xb
02	Medal of Honor: European Assault ea / xb
03	Forza Motorsport microsoft / xb
04	Meteos nintendo / ds
05	Advent Rising microsoft / xb



Chris Hoffman

game editor

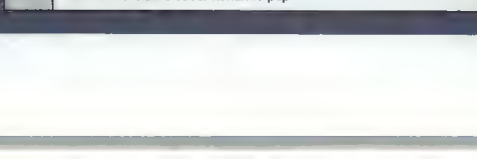
01	Capcom Classics Collection capcom / xb
02	Meteos nintendo / ds
03	Sigma Star Saga namco / gba
04	WWE Day of Reckoning 2 thq / gc
05	Conker: Live and Reloaded microsoft / xb



Michael Hobbs

art director

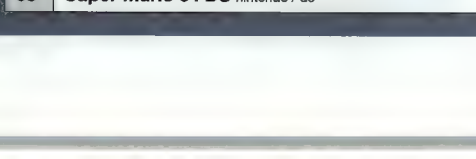
01	Conker: Live and Reloaded microsoft / xb
02	Meteos nintendo / ds
03	Phantasy Star Online: Blue Burst sega / pc
04	Kirby: Canvas Curse nintendo / ds
05	Metal Gear Acid konami / psp



Ashley Esqueda

associate editor/internet director

01	Guild Wars ncsoft / pc
02	Conker: Live and Reloaded microsoft / xb
03	Star Wars: Republic Commando lucasarts / xb
04	God of War sony / ps2
05	Super Mario 64 DS nintendo / ds



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DAVE KIRKMAN ATTACHED

Things to do in Arizona when you're dead

Words Dave Halverson

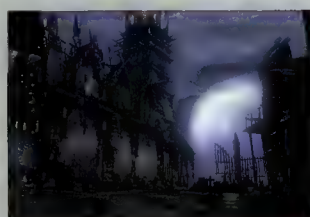
he thing about video games that separates them from other forms of entertainment is obviously the interactive component that requires the player think about and/or react to his or her surroundings—commonly known as gameplay—arguably the most important facet of any game. But it wasn't always this way. Back when gameplay was highly formulaic, games were made or broken by their (hand drawn) art, followed by animation, control precision and music. Gameplay was key, but not nearly as difficult to refine as it is today...



After 3D gaming's awkward incubation period—plagued by hideous 3D polygonal graphics with visible seams and blocky characters—it began to find its way with the advent of 128-bit consoles, and as the sun sets on their eventful five-year reign, we've arrived at this most critical juncture, where art, once again, resides on par with the interactive experience. In no FPS is this more prevalent than *Darkwatch*, where the highest order of tactical action is met with a level of artistry seldom seen in 3D game design. And not necessarily or primarily within the character designs (although they are spectacular), but in the terrain itself, among other places we generally zip by. This is the stop-and-smell-the-roses FPS, even if they are withered and dead. Every step you take, the world under Jericho's feet (accompanied by the inimitable jingle of spurs) appears natural; erosion, cracks, puddles and ecological irregularities all appear as if you happened upon them in the real world. The same goes for the structures above ground that look as though High Moon bought old boards and hammered them together. On the *Darkwatch* train, not only are the chains holding the crates perfectly modeled, but they're fastened, correctly, to brackets on the floor where random planks are rotted through, showing the rushing track below. Brittle enemies explode at the



You can shoot half a Bandito's head off and it'll still come...and these guys hit hard.



"Every step you take, the world under Jericho's feet (accompanied by the inimitable jingle of spurs) appears natural..."

butt of your rifle, bodies crumble, contort and stagger realistically, and details such as fine mist and standing water appear 100 percent authentic. There's many a moment within *Darkwatch* where you'll stop and take in your surroundings, realizing that what's before you looks more like a painting than a myriad of triangles. In terms of detail, this is truly next-level stuff. It also (aliasing aside) looks nearly as good on PS2 as it does Xbox. I'm not sure how they did it, but this is the closest a game of this magnitude has come to being identical across platform lines. High Moon Studios has become one of the industry's most elite developers with its very first game, and one of the future's most promising

new brands has been born.

Darkwatch has been at the very top of my must-have list since the day I laid eyes on it—the premise and setting being what they are—but little did I know that this was merely set dressing for a deeply rewarding tactical FPS/adventure experience. This is no by-the-numbers see-(and-kill)-the-scary-monsters FPS (which would have sufficed), but a highly tactical first-person action-shooter with two delectably ill-intentioned added features: bone-crunching melee combat and an omnibus of vampiric powers. It also happens to contain multiple endings, gaming's first unobtrusive sex scene (see inset) and enemy AI that would make

Bungie blush. I ran across an arrow-shooting undead brave dug in about 50 yards out and, retreating to grab the range rifle I'd discarded a ways back, the brainy ghoul took after me while my back was turned. You would never expect an enemy to desert a post so far off, but these enemies don't just see you, they smell you, and once they get a whiff, you're on the menu.

Dare I say Darkwatch is a Halo killer? Hell no. Halo is responsible for the biggest opening day take in entertainment history; it can't be killed. But is this a better single-player game? You betcha; in my book, there's no comparison. Now, before you go devising ways to have me run over

"...two delectably ill-intentioned added features: bone-crunching melee combat and an omnibus of vampiric powers."

with a Warthog, let me elaborate. Quite simply, I prefer vampires, banshees and other assorted undead foes (and these are the best ever, folks) over space aliens any day of the week, especially when I'm also given the choice between a luscious leather-clad cowgirl and a sultry, naughty warrior queen in the process—one of which I get to nail (figuratively speaking) within the context of the game. Plenty of games go to outer space, but precious few do the vampiric eloquently. That and, well, the art in Darkwatch is just superior in every way.

It all begins when hapless outlaw Jericho Cross releases the mother of all vampire lords on the old West, and in doing so trades in his six-shooter for a Redeemer and his soul for one of two spectral fates. He's turning vampire and there actually is a damn thing he can do about it... Thanks, Jericho; don't mind if I do.

To sum up the gameplay, imagine the tactical and vehicular scenarios of Halo combined with the visceral action and shooting of Doom 3 and the jumping elements of Metroid Prime, all wrapped

This church comes to life in the name

Steve
STEVE JUNG 04/02/04

in an M-rated pitch-black Western that takes you through a complex necropolis pursued by an unyielding army of the damned. But you're not alone. As a Darkwatch Regulator, you're part of a team, even if you are the only bloodsucker in the bunch—the very thing they live to eliminate. Lazarus wants your allegiance and your soul, Cassidy wants you to break his curse on the West, and Tala, well, Tala wants it all. High Moon doesn't drag out the story, but what's here is deftly incorporated into the action and sets up a next-gen sequel like nobody's business. Slightly enhanced in-game models add continuity to the cutscenes and the voice

acting is superb. Granting us a legitimate sex scene is one thing; Rose McGowan doing the panting and moaning is just sweet icing.

Like any good FPS, weapon selection is key (and there's a bountiful assortment scattered about the levels) and headshots preferred, but Jericho's undead alterations spice things up considerably. Choose the light (Carol Ann flashback) and earn powers such as Fear and Mystic Armor, while a saunter down the dark path will earn you such hexes as Blood Frenzy and Black Shroud. The path you choose greatly affects the outcome of the game, making multiple passes a rewarding endeavor all

the while prying open the mass of extras. Prepare yourself for a couple of old-school boss battles as well, and if you're blessed with 5.1, some of the best sound effects and ambient noise this side of Call of Duty. I'd expound on the collection of split-screen multiplayer, downloadable content and Live modes too...if I cared. These are of no interest to me, but the people in the know tell me High Moon get these right too, which comes as no surprise. I'd rather they spent the time on more Coyote and Shadow (Jericho's horse) levels, but I'm a selfish single-player freak. My controller-two port is a big virgin.

I won't say Darkwatch has any real

The scene below depicts the kind of concept art that precedes in-game visuals as profound as Darkwatch's.

"Lazarus wants your allegiance and your soul, Cassidy wants you to break his curse on the West, and Tala, well, Tala wants it all."



shortcomings, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and this one has a few obligatory (and minor) bones to pick. For one, all of the Darkwatch Regulators look the same. And while I know (because I asked) this was done to achieve 60 fps on the Xbox version, I still think subtle differences could have been achieved. Also, while I appreciate ogling Tala back at the Citadel (Darkwatch HQ), I'd prefer she was leaning against a wall or something rather than hanging out in her in-game idle, gun drawn—just looks unnatural. Within the context of an action game, these things matter not, but bear mentioning since such easily achieved tweaks would

make a subtle difference in the game's overall continuity. I'd have appreciated more than a single Coyote level too, seeing how it's probably the coolest vehicle ever inserted into an action game, but something (okay, the studio) tells me my wishes will all come true and then some in the proposed sequel. We may even get a third-person camera, which would make this utterly glorious on next-gen console.

In the end, which this is, whether you base your purchasing decisions on graphics, gameplay or longevity, Darkwatch delivers on all fronts. Jericho and company sucked precious days out of my busy schedule and I can't wait to

go back for more. In a sea of me-too first-person shooters, Darkwatch marches to its own cadaverous drummer.

Darkwatch

PlayStation 2, Xbox

90

Score

Impeccable detail and artistry alive in every environment, spectacular tactical and melee gameplay, hot leather-clad babes.

Some repeat models, a few minor quibbles in continuity. Not much negative here, I'm afraid.

Developer: High Moon Studios Publisher: Capcom

Online: Top team warfare (Xbox only) Available: August

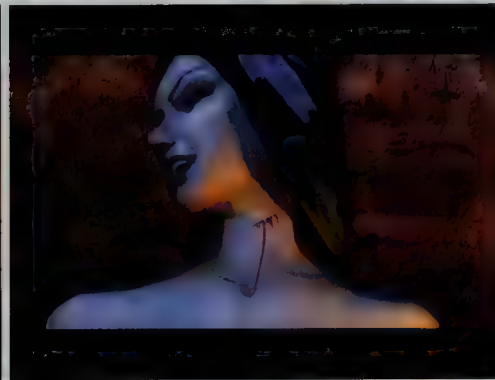
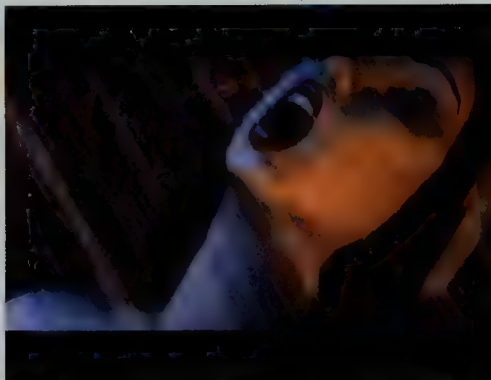
INTERVIEW

HIGH MOON STUDIOS



"Take all of me!"

The game's integral sex scene, a key device in the arc of the story pertaining to the outcome of the game, was actually edited from a slightly longer—and in our opinion, better—cut, which High Moon may release elsewhere.



High Moon Studios

INTERVIEW

CHRIS ULM *chief design officer*
 PAUL O'CONNOR *VP, design director*
 FARZAD VARAHRAMYAN *VP, creative visual director*
 SEAN MILLER *lead artist*

play: Darkwatch is a very special game from a tactical, technical, ambient and artistic standpoint, and while I realize you can't come right out and say you're doing a sequel—with a third-person camera and more horse and steam wagon stages *nudge*—can you elaborate on what you personally find most special or appealing about your first game?

Paul O'Connor: The most special thing for me is that in Darkwatch we've built a shooter "for the rest of us." In researching for this game, we played pretty much every console first-person shooter title out there, and most of them were just too awkward or too complicated to allow the kind of run-and-gun fun that we wanted for Darkwatch. We really sweated the details for the controls, and I think it shows. Our mantra was to make ordinary players feel like masters and masters feel like gods, and I think we got there. Within moments of picking up this game, you'll be leaping over buildings, splitting skulls with your gun butt and scattering zombies like ten-pins with a fistful of dynamite.



"Our mantra was to make ordinary players feel like masters and masters feel like gods, and I think we got there."

PAUL O'CONNOR VP, design director



You'll get shot a dozen times and laugh it off. You'll splatter the undead and drink up their blood clouds. This moment-to-moment gameplay is just damn fun...but more importantly, it's accessible. Our goal in future High Moon games is to take this accessibility mandate and apply it to other genres and mechanics.

Chris Ulm: In addition to the very well-tuned moment-to-moment gameplay of Darkwatch and technical excellence of the game, which allowed us to create intense action sequences, vehicles and unique enemies with a solid framerate on all platforms, I am proud of the artistic vision and storytelling sensibility of the world. The Haunted West of Darkwatch is a really interesting and creepy place, straight out of the twisted imaginations of an incredibly dedicated and creative team, and there's not another game like it.

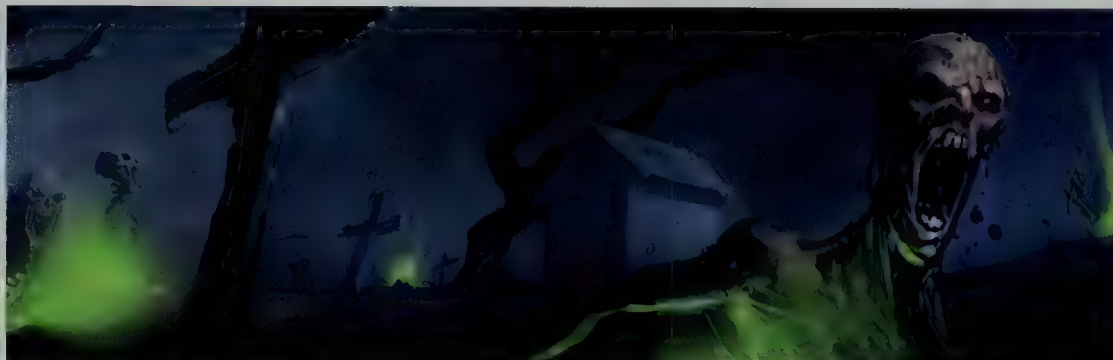
Wasn't there talk of a free-roaming horse level at one point? Anything else you wish you could have done but didn't have time to squeeze in?

Ulm: We tested different variants of implementing Shadow, Jericho's vampiric horse, and found that the version that ships with the game gave us the kind of action and player control that was the most fun.

Those of you who came over from Oddworld—what did you bring with you and where do we see it represented in Darkwatch?

O'Connor: Oddworld uncovered our mania for quality and attention to detail. Oddworld was like a great prep school where we learned a lot about bringing together the various disciplines of engineering, art and game design to tell an interactive story. High Moon was where we were able to really cut loose with those principles and apply them to a broad-market action game.

Farzad Varahramyan: Oddworld was a creatively rich and challenging environment. I helped establish their production design department, including recruiting and training the artists and helping establish within the teams the



importance of maintaining consistency throughout our visual development of original property. At High Moon, I have applied the same method of visual development and original IP creation, multiplying its effectiveness over several projects with the help of many talented people.

Ulm: Oddworld's games are inventive, original and beautifully detailed. In designing Darkwatch, we additionally wanted to bring in darker, more horrific themes, a very fast pace and multiplayer elements on both PS2 and Xbox.

These characters *scream* next-gen and everything that goes with it, all clad in leather and/or rotting skin. It's the kind of brand we get up for and that gaming needs as it crosses the next threshold... Are we witnessing the beginning of

a much deeper tale? Was this indeed designed as a series?

Ulm: The current incarnation of Darkwatch in the Haunted West is just the first of a series of stories featuring undead gunslinger Jericho Cross. Each story will stand on its own and feature both returning and new characters—when we first set out to create the world of Darkwatch we vowed to ourselves that events would matter—characters die, heroes and villains evolve. The core concept of Darkwatch was not only intended as a series, but intended as a larger universe of possibilities beyond the Haunted West. (The Darkwatch goes back thousands of years and also goes forward in time to the modern era and beyond.)

You win the prize for best banshees. What or who is your favorite character? Main

and otherwise?

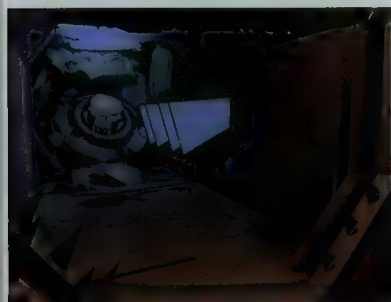
O'Connor: It's hard to beat the Banshee. I'm partial to the Vipers. I think their teleport move is unique and visually very cool. I love to take them on with a shotgun and dynamite in Hangtown.

Ulm: Personally, I'm a big fan of Reapers. I never get tired of decapitating them and watching them reach for their missing heads. It's a real stress reliever.

Varahramyan: One of my favorite characters is the Oozer. His sheer size, animations, FX and hit reactions make him very entertaining to me.

Perhaps more than any FPS I've played, the Darkwatch code seems alive. There's design in every step—within irregularities in the ground, walls, puddles and sewer water, and in the finest of details like glass, chains, etc. Looking

Below: The first scene that stopped me cold. That final frame is the game.



"The Haunted West of Darkwatch is a really interesting and creepy place, straight out of the twisted imaginations of an incredibly dedicated and creative team..."

CHRIS ULM chief design officer

towards the back of the Darkwatch train car after Lazarus bolts through the roof (see sequential above), it looks like a painting. Is the secret in the texture, the architecture underneath it, or both?

Sean Miller: It is really a combination of both. Our artists use their artistic sensibilities for composition and lighting to help focus and enhance gameplay, creating interesting silhouettes and choosing textures and lighting that will create a sense of drama and immerse the player in the world we are creating. Much of the detail comes from the early stages of pre-production. We have a terrific concept art department that creates paintings and drawings based on design geometry for many of our levels, setting the mood and suggesting the levels of detail and intricacies we would like to achieve.

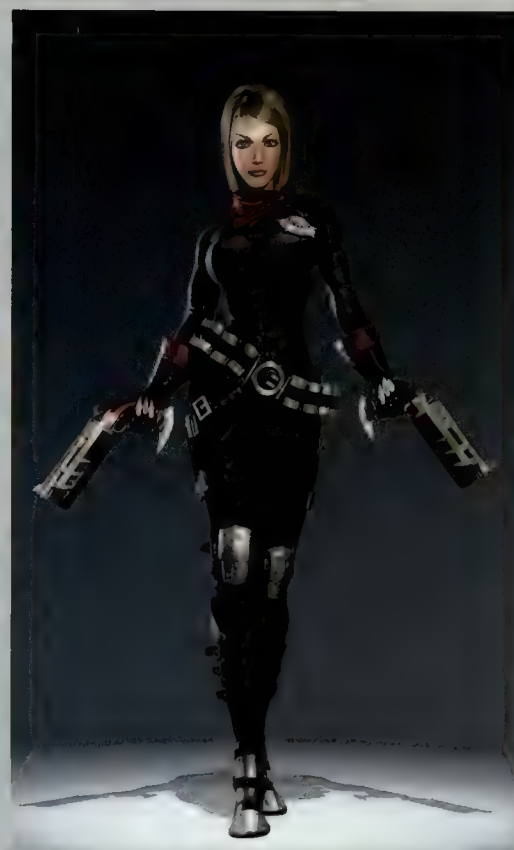
Ivan Power and his team of environment artists use those images as a guideline and inspiration in creating the geometry and textures. We try to push the engine to the edges of its ability in both the number of polygons as well as number and sizes of texture maps that we use. As the concept art develops early on in production, our

HIGH MOON STUDIOS

The work environment obviously has a direct correlation with efficiency and quality.

3D environment team spends a lot of time researching and experimenting with techniques to bring the concept art to life. Combining traditional and digital painting techniques with high-quality photo references, they build a library of textures that will define the look for each particular level. Then, using the texture library we have assembled, create new variations of the textures to fit specific areas, and, layering textured geometry with alpha, we build up the detail in the level. Lighting is also one of the other key aspects of our environment pipeline. Using a proprietary vertex lighting tool developed by our tools programmers, we translate our lighting into vertex color to create the drama and variation throughout the level. Our tool allows us to quickly iterate on very detailed lighting while keeping our polygon limits reasonable for real-time rendering. With the ability to quickly cut in detailed lighting and global illumination, artist Isabelle Chen was able to choose higher-resolution images and use fog, vertex lighting and alpha to create variation and interest in the environment and still maintain the high level of detail we were shooting for.

You're responsible for the first non-



"...I was never really nervous about this sex scene because it is dramatically valid. It's a critical story point that concludes our second act..."

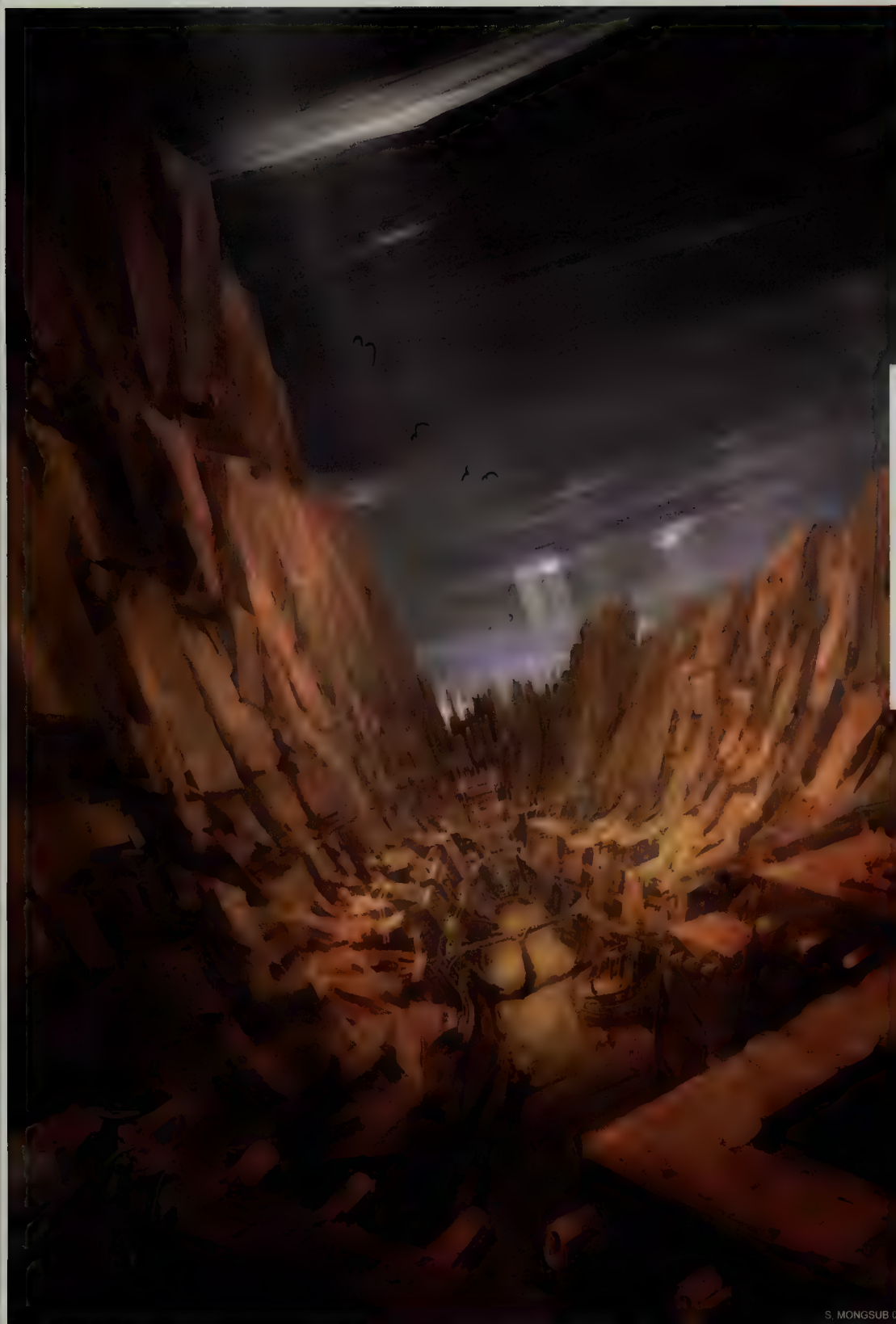
PAUL O'CONNOR VP, design director



exploitive sex scene in a video game—bravo and thank you—and you managed to have Rose McGowan speak (and pant) the lines. Did you toy a lot with how much to show? The side shot is lovely but you flash it fast. Were you nervous about retail? I mean, in GTA they're killing hookers... Might we see an uncut version online?

O'Connor: We're always nervous about retail. But I was never really nervous about this sex scene because it is dramatically valid. It's a critical story point that concludes our second act and sets up the twist for the third act. It will come as something of a surprise, but when the player looks back on it, it should make perfect sense, because so much of the story

Might as well start memorizing this chasm now...you'll be dug in soon enough.



S. MONGSUB 04

turns on what happens in this scene. It is explicit, but not gratuitous. I'm proud of it. We spent a lot of editorial time on this scene. The storyboards went through several revisions, as did the animatic. After animation, the scene went through further rounds of cuts. The source material is preserved and an "uncut" version might be aired someday...but only for curiosity's sake. Showing more skin won't change the emotional and dramatic value of the scene, which is really the most important thing.

How was Rose to work with?

O'Connor: Rose was pretty terrific. Video games were new for her, but she was game to try new things and she gave a good effort.

Jennifer Hale is, of course, always great, as is Michael Bell. Did you pick Jennifer

"Showing more skin won't change the emotional and dramatic value of the scene, which is really the most important thing."

PAUL O'CONNOR VP, design director

because of her work as Samus or in Mercenaries or just by her portfolio? They also worked together on Shadow of Rome. Any connection?

O'Connor: Jennifer and Michael were both suggested to us by our VO director, Art Currim, at Black Powder Media. Art had worked with them in the past and knew they'd be perfect for the roles. And he was right. Art was a real star for us on this project, both in arranging our voice talent and in directing them.

So game one is finished and you're a shiny new studio with the next gen over the horizon; sum up your feelings as you prepare for your next project...

Ulm: Our vision for the Darkwatch world and characters as well as new and yet unnamed projects extends well beyond the capabilities of current-generation technology, so I am ecstatic that the High Moon team will be able to use the power of the next generation consoles to create ever more immersive and emotionally rich experiences on a variety of projects.

GRAPHIC NOVEL

FROM HEAVY METAL

A VERY GRAPHIC NOVEL

Should you be compelled to dig deeper into Darkwatch lore once you've traversed the chapters of the game, you might want to head over to heavymetal.com (then the "Shop TV" link) and order up a back issue of the July 2005 issue of Heavy Metal, which features Tala and Cassidy on the cover, as well as the graphic novel, which serves as a precursor to the game; it, in fact, fades to black exactly where the events of the game begin...**play**



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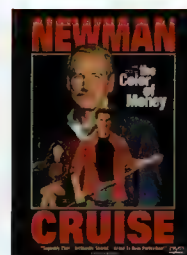
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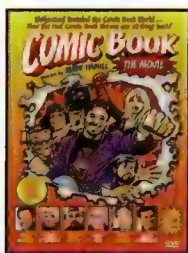


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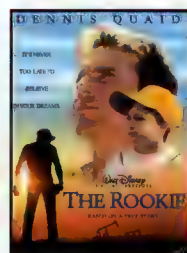
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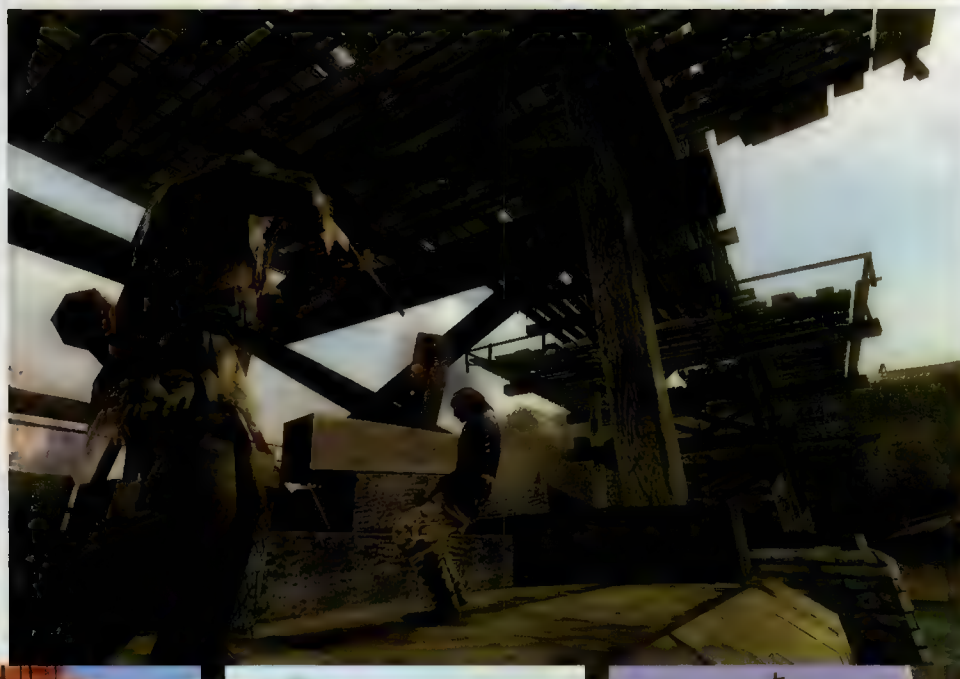
Neversoft says goodbye to skateboards and urban sprawl and hello to whores, horses and pistols

Bodies hanging by a noose over the gallows, showgirls supplying the severed bloody ears, whisky in hand, Neversoft president Joel Jewett took the stage with an angry visage and irascible tone. No, he wasn't pissed off that his successful company has been locked down making licensed games like Tony Hawk and Spider-Man since the beginning of time. He was simply providing a spicy introduction to Neversoft's totally original GUN, establishing the point that this Western-themed action game is mean, violent and brutal.

The footage that followed showed wild barroom shootouts, collapsing horses, whores used for cover, exploding dynamite shattering victims into juicy chunks—you know, all the stuff wild, wild Western dreams are made of. All the action takes place in the third person, fast and furious and apparently filled with a ton of complex elements.

GUN is certainly big on firearms and the many violent ways you can use them for your devious pleasures, but storytelling is a part of the foundation. In fact, Jewett commented that involving us with the central character and his quest for revenge is perhaps even more important than all the carnage for the game's emotional center. Because the game is free-roaming, the choices made outside the central narrative structure are entirely yours to make. Neversoft wants the world to be alive and vast, even providing such necessities as traveling outside into the wilderness to hunt for food.

A brief look at the 360 version was also given, showcasing a dramatic scene in the open prairie filled with an enormous entourage of charging horses and cowboys caught in an all-out war. It seems like everyone now wants to demo the forthcoming hardware's ability to render huge amounts of activity onscreen at once. Sheer numbers aside, it still comes down to the appeal of theme and actual interaction of ideas, and GUN, in its brief introduction, hit the mark. *Brady Fletcher*



Violent death animations are intensified by blood and chunks.



GUN

Point of Interest
Neversoft's first game was the Saturn action game, Skeleton Warriors.

Developer: Neversoft **Publisher:** Activision
Online: TBA **Available:** 2006

"GUN is certainly big on firearms and the many violent ways you can use them for your devious pleasures..."

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SCORE

73/

10

MAKAI KINGDOM

Chronicles of the Sacred Tome

"In short, Nippon Ichi appears to be going far to ensure that Makai Kingdom is the richest and most complex game the company has released for the PS2"

"...the game is much more than just Disgaea with a fresh coat of paint"

— GameSpy

JULY 27TH 2005



PlayStation 2



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Sly 3

Honor Among Thieves

Cavorting with critters

With Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus, Sucker Punch reemerged on the scene (on the Sony side of the fence, no less) after shocking Nintendo 64 gamers (in the know enough to find it) with their revolutionary debut, *Rocket: Robot on Wheels*, then last year followed up with an ambitious sequel that expanded the Sly universe considerably. True to form, they're back again just a year later with *Sly 3*, which once again finds Sly and company embarking on an entirely new adventure riding on a considerably reconfigured gameplay model, indicative of the first two games but new in many awe-inspiring ways.

Much time has passed since the events of *Band of Thieves*: Murray, unable to forgive himself for the injuries Bentley sustained in the final battle with Clockwerk, has become a student of "Australian Dreamtime" and embarked on a path of righteousness and non-violence, while Bentley (being Bentley) has spent the time in the monster garage fashioning himself one seriously tricked-out wheelchair



complete with afterburners and a spin attack... He's not handicapped; he's handicapped! Sly, meanwhile, took up with one of his dad's old gang, McSweeney, until he learned of the Cooper family vault, which is where Sly 3 opens. After a quick com-link from Bentley, it's just you, Sly and a massive fortress in the foreground. Just like old times... But you're not alone.

Sly and Bentley had to assemble the ultimate dream team to get this far, which you'll quickly fathom as the impassable is made clear. But who are these new allies? One voice sounds familiar, but nah...it can't be. Arriving at the massive vault atop the island fortress, the notch matching Sly's cane is all that stands between him and his



Sucker Punch continues to take game design in shocking new directions.

“...call me a sucker for a gimmick, but when I slid on the Sly-styled 3D glasses, I went totally gaga.”

birthright...and then, all hell breaks loose. After a brief exchange with Dr. M (Cooper Island's got itself one mean squatter), Sly sacrifices himself to save Bentley, and as he awakens, delirious, the game begins, flashing back to the beginning of the tale, as he and Bentley set out to assemble the team.

If I didn't take another step from that point, I was already sure this was going to be the ultimate realization of the Sly franchise. You can almost feel the team's love for their creatures shining through the code. Sly 3 feels brand new, thanks in no small part to Bentley, whose gameplay you will fall madly in love with the second you start to tool around in his wheelchair. But there's more...much more. Now, call me a sucker for a gimmick, but when I slid on the

Sly-styled 3D glasses, I went totally gaga. I love 3D, especially in the hands of artisans who know how to use it, and Sucker Punch knows how to use it. For what they do with lasers and depth perception in the first level that uses them, they deserve some kind of award. I'd kill for a console that used the old Sega Master System technology (Maze Hunter 3D anyone?) over red-blue, but I'll take it where I can get it. The other level I sampled had Bentley powering down a canal in a gondola with Sly shooting and jumping in an attempt to thwart an attempt on Carmelita's life—yet another ingenious device added to the multitude of play styles Sly has provided over the years (and, as always, masterfully executed).

Sly 3 has a big caper feel to it, like a 'toon version of *Ocean's Eleven*. You can sense where it's going and you can't wait to get there, and I've only nicked the surface. This could very well end up being the ultimate PS2 platforming adventure.

Dave Halverson

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves

PlayStation 2

Point of Interest

The name "raccoon" comes from the Algonquin word "arukon" which means "one who scratches with his hands."

Developer: Sucker Punch Publisher: Sony Online: None Available: September



THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Ultimate Destruction

You'll like him (again) when he's angry

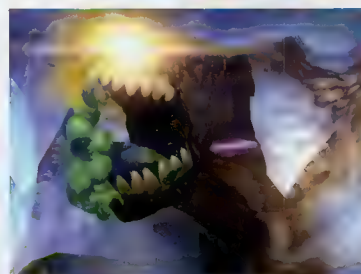


Make that two comic book characters taking up residence in GTA-like constructs, only this one is having way too much fun. Where Spider-Man dispensed his jollies via web-slinging—things were far less tuned on the ground—Hulk uses the city like a giant erector set, leaving a mark wherever his titanic frame takes him—wall running, climbing, vaulting, lock-on heaving, atomic clapping... I spent five minutes punting cars (once I purchased the move) and nearly laughed myself to death ripping trees out of the ground and batting around citizens like tee-ball practice. The savage amusement of picking up a bus, running full steam, launching into the air and whipping it like a toy into a chopper is a powerful elixir...and if that doesn't float your boat, you can "weaponize" it and turn it into a pair of heavy metal boxing gloves and beat on anything en masse. Loud, exploding,

fiery, destructive, feverishly pissed-off gameplay: This is how you make a Hulk video game. As with Spidey, sacrifices are made (although less so) in the name of scope, but if you've ever found solace in tooling around in GTA wreaking havoc, you'll be more than happy to pay the price. And once you get your fill of *being* the Hulk, the core game—30 levels worth of story-driven mission ops, including 40 side missions over eight chapters and six bosses penned by award-winning comic book writer Paul Jenkins—is even more Hulkified.

Seems like wherever Banner goes, there's some military muscle-head looking to flush him out for all the wrong reasons. But this time Bruce has help and a convenient home base from where he can

Free roaming done right: Maneuvers such as wall-running become second nature.



"Grab a cowering pedestrian and slam it, squish it, or simply pat it on its head..."

choose missions or spend Smash Points to purchase new moves, then head out to the city or badlands, moving the plot forward via a series of missions that take full advantage of what the developers have wrought: big, green, take-no-prisoners, free-roaming mass destruction. Grab a cowering pedestrian and slam it, squish it, or simply pat it on its head and release it back into the wild... Is that a four-story-high mecha beast coming my way? Hold that thought... Dave Halverson



The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Point of Interest

Since 1962, Hulk has gone through both grey- and green-skinned iterations.

Developer: Radical Entertainment Publisher: VU Games

Online: None Available: August

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PlayStation 2

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PLAYING IS BELIEVING

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION

History in the gaming

If you were anywhere near an arcade in the 1980s and early '90s, then you already know what Capcom Classics Collection is all about: 22 of the greatest (and a few of the more obscure) games that made video gaming into what it is today. You'll save princesses; you'll go deep into enemy territory to rescue a former President; you'll hit the streets to pulverize punks; you'll have shootouts in the Old West; you'll fly through the sky to destroy evil gods; you'll battle the greatest martial artists in the world; you'll even ironically become a WWII pilot to keep the Pacific safe from the Japanese. And now you won't have to insert another quarter when you die.

From ancient games like Son Son and Exed Exes to the incomparable fighting of the Street Fighter II series, the list is a digital history of Capcom gaming. Although the majority of games were released in arcade-perfect (or in Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts' case, SNES-perfect) form in the Capcom Generation series during the 32-bit era, most of those compilations didn't come to the U.S., meaning this will be first time North American gamers will be able to enjoy flawless translations of the 1942 series, the Ghosts 'n Goblins series, Commando, Mercs, Gun.Smoke, Pirate Ship Higemaru, Vulgus and others. As for the other games included here—Final Fight, Forgotten Worlds, Trojan, Section Z, Leg-

endary Wings and Bionic Commando—this will be the first time the titles have seen arcade-perfect releases on console, period. And for the record, that is the arcade version of Bionic Commando, although Capcom is looking into a way to include the lengthier NES version as well.

From what we've played so far, Capcom Classics Collection is living up to its billing: the games are exact duplicates of their coin-op counterparts. Forgotten Worlds has never looked better and plays great with dual analog control; Ghosts 'n Goblins is as challenging (and curse-inducing) as ever; playing Mercs at home with three players at once is awesome; Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting will still keep you fighting friends for hours; and a home version of Final Fight with absolutely no compromises is something I've personally been waiting

"...this will be the first time the titles have seen arcade-perfect releases on console, period."

You cannot stop me with
paramedic alone!

for for 15 years. We expect the other titles to follow suit. And beyond just all this classic gaming goodness, Capcom is promising plenty of bonus features, including remixed soundtracks, game tips, enhanced control options (hurray for rapid-fire!) and art galleries. My only complaint so far is the exclusion of Strider, but now I'm just being greedy. Chris Hoffman

Capcom Classics Collection

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Point of Interest

Some of these classics were scheduled to come to PS1 in the U.S. years ago, but Sony rejected them.

Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom

Online: None Available: September



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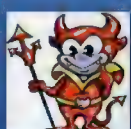
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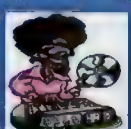
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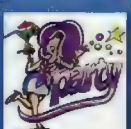
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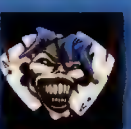
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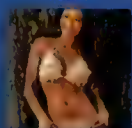
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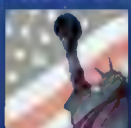
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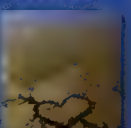
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RINGTONES

01126602 - Milkshake - Kelis
01129680 - Burn - Usher
01124998 - U Got It Bad - Usher
01124015 - Take On Me - A-Ha
01124066 - Barbie Girl - Aqua
01123950 - P.I.M.P. - 50 Cent
01125428 - Dilemma - Nelly
01126241 - Stunt 101 - G-Unit
01124685 - Party Up - DMX
01126416 - Why - Jadakiss
01124876 - Seinfeld - Theme
01125236 - Terminator - Theme
01126346 - The Jetsons - Theme
01125653 - Ignition - R. Kelly
01125791 - Duality - Slipknot
01125866 - Santeria - Sublime
01124529 - Clocks - Coldplay
01124037 - Fallin' - Alicia Keys
01129414 - Faint - Linkin Park
01126701 - Numb - Linkin Park
01125732 - Push It - Salt N Pepa
01124594 - Sandstorm - DaRude
01133713 - Roxanne - The Police
01133696 - Transformers - Theme
01131947 - Will And Grace - Theme
01124851 - Incredible Hulk - Theme
01129602 - Are You In - Incubus
01124244 - No Rain - Blind Melon

01133275 - Home - 3 Days Grace
01129678 - Angie - Rolling Stones
01126086 - Can't Deny It - Fabolous
01125939 - Hey Jude - The Beatles
01125958 - Yesterday - The Beatles
01133715 - Ironic - Alanis Morissette
01126453 - Change Clothes - Jay-Z
01129571 - Kashmir - Led Zeppelin
01125805 - Beautiful - Snoop Dogg
01133703 - To Be With You - Mr. Big
01125468 - Don't Speak - No Doubt
01124453 - Dirty - Christina Aguilera
01126312 - Clint Eastwood - Gorillaz
01133734 - Foolish Games - Jewel
01132644 - Like A Virgin - Madonna
01132442 - Lovefool - The Cardigans
01124194 - Sabotage - Beastie Boys
01124388 - Fire It Up - Busta Rhymes
01124960 - With Or Without You - U2
01124853 - Inspector Gadget - Theme
01124900 - Law And Order - Theme
01133310 - Days Of Our Lives - Theme
01133316 - Meet The Flintstones - Theme
01131208 - Rocky - Gonna Fly Now - Theme
01125214 - Singing In The Rain - Theme
01131210 - Starsky And Hutch - Theme
01124892 - The Twilight Zone - Theme
01133333 - Woody Woodpecker - Theme

01133741 - We Will Rock You - Queen
01124606 - My Own Summer - Dextones
01124896 - American Pie - Don McLean
01129668 - American Idiot - Green Day
01129616 - Start Me Up - Rolling Stones
01133503 - Let Me Go - 3 Doors Down
01131188 - The Reason - Hoobastank
01126635 - Rock And Roll All Nite - Kiss
01133698 - Lady Marmalade - All Saints
01129674 - Ain't It Funny - Jennifer Lopez
01126529 - With You - Jessica Simpson
01124713 - The Next Episode - Dr. Dre
01124713 - Dirt Off Your Shoulder - Jay-Z
01126756 - Block Lockdown - Ludacris
01126837 - No More Drama - Mary J. Blige
01126888 - Get Ur Freak On - Missy Elliot
01123922 - Until The End Of Time - 2Pac
01123982 - More Than A Woman - Aaliyah
01126581 - Seniorita - Justin Timberlake
01129521 - 1, 2 Step - Ciara feat. Missy Elliot
01129617 - Drop It Like It's Hot - Snoop Dogg
01133468 - Let's Get Blown - Snoop Dogg
01129426 - My Boo - Usher & Alicia Keys
01126383 - Cops - Bad Boys - Inner Circle
01126423 - Miami Vice - Jan Hammer
01125419 - Batman Theme - Neal Hefti
01125674 - Ghostbusters - Ray Parker Jr.
01125700 - La Bamba - Ritchie Valens

01129387 - Monkees Theme - The Monkees
01133733 - All That She Wants - Ace of Base
01129527 - I'm a Slave 4 U - Britney Spears
01129605 - Breaking the Habit - Linkin Park
01124253 - All The Small Things - Blink 182
01133292 - Numb / Encore - Jay-Z & Linkin Park
01126284 - I Will Survive - Gloria Gaynor
01126822 - She Will Be Loved - Maroon 5
01126860 - Black Or White - Michael Jackson
01125481 - Don't Know Why - Norah Jones
01125693 - Livin' On A Prayer - Ricki Martin
01123925 - Away from the Sun - 3 Doors Down
01124368 - Oops! ... I Did It Again - Britney Spears
01126283 - Turn The Beat Around - Gloria Estefan
01126792 - Sweet Home Alabama - Lynyrd Skynyrd
01133682 - Mama I'm Coming Home - Ozzy Osbourne
01133725 - The Man With The Golden Gun - Theme
01129412 - Old School - Dust In The Wind - Kansas
01126754 - 2 Fast 2 Furious - Act A Fool - Ludacris
01125607 - Another Brick In The Wall - Pink Floyd
01129546 - City Of Angels - Iris - Goo Goo Doll
01133705 - Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon - Theme
01126339 - Pink Panther Theme - Henry Mancini
01125911 - House Of The Rising Sun - The Animals
01133720 - Pour Some Sugar on Me - Def Leppard
01126664 - Stairway To Heaven (Intro) - Led Zeppelin
01129672 - Boulevard of Broken Dreams - Green Day
01124158 - As Long As You Love Me - Backstreet Boys

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Legend of Kay

Rats and cats combat

It is both a shame and a travesty that games of this ilk have been labeled "baby games" (I'd like to see the people who say that beat one) and given a rigid middle finger by the vast majority of media outlets. Creature-based action-platforming is where gaming was born and where the best bits of it still reside, so those of you open-minded enough to embark on a journey as a bipedal talking cat out to save pandas, rabbits and frogs from the tyrannical rule of gorillas and rats... please stand up. See, right there, to me, that's a big part of what makes gaming great, and Neon Studios has certainly done their part in preserving the kind. Legend of Kay is no cat in sheep's clothing, but an intricate, full-fledged platforming epic in the vein of Mario, Banjo, Jak and Dexter, Maximo, Crash, etc.

Perhaps more so than any erstwhile title, Kay also delivers a deeply nuanced combat system, incorporating various forms of magic with a chain technique used for both fighting and flying—sequentially striking at bell-shaped "Zhongs" to negotiate sheer cliffs, cross wide chasms and solve environmental puzzles. It's also one of the most story-rich, as nearly every critter in the game has something to say (some more suitably voiced than others), albeit mostly trite, obvious and oft times unnecessarily tongue-in-cheek (I draw the line at rabbits belting out five-minutes-ago slogans).

But the melting pot of mainstay devices escapes unscathed by the pandering... Boar and dragon riding, spinning and/or moving platforms, climbing, various swinging acrobatics and all types of environmental hazards combine with enough themed hubs and branching arteries to keep your mind on everything but all the furry little freaks scampering about, the worst of which are the rats. The main adversary and mastermind of the new critter order, the rat leader, Tak, has the apes eating out of his claw. Just add a stellar neo-Japanese soundtrack and, well, if you've read this far, need I say more? Dave Halverson

Legend of Kay

PlayStation 2

Point of Interest

Rats are fastidiously clean animals, grooming themselves several times a day.

Developer: Neon Studios Publisher: Capcom

Online: None Available: September

Once Kay is fully armored and powered up, he becomes one mean kitty.



"Legend of Kay is no cat in sheep's clothing, but an intricate, full-fledged platforming epic in the vein of Mario, Banjo, Jak and Dexter..."



Mortal Kombat

Shaolin Monks

Monk business

The last time Mortal Kombat strayed this far from the arena (MK: Special Forces) the results weren't pretty, but this is a new era—one in which Midway is sitting atop a pile of triple-A software. Of all of their recent offerings, however, none has impressed me so much as Shaolin Monks, developed by newly acquired Paradox Development, responsible for such titles as Blackthorne 32X, X-Men: Next Dimension and the ill-fated Thrill Kill, the outstandingly twisted PS1 fighter EA banished to save our souls.

As someone who truly thrives on the connection between player and character, I couldn't be more impressed with Shaolin Monks. Liu Kang and Kung Lao are among the most fluid and responsive characters

I've ever had the pleasure of controlling. Expect to be launching 30-plus-hit juggling combos from the outset, followed by air juggles, charging strikes and weapons melee as instantly intuitive as they are wickedly fun. They lean correctly, react in perfect concert with the controls, and every point of impact is seemingly hardwired to your commands. The game just feels incredibly good. I can't really comment on the design overall, as we were granted access to a single level for preview purposes, but I can say that what's here is some of the most intuitive fighting action I've experienced since the heyday of 2D, supported by efficiently arranged controls that find quick, launch and power strikes augmented by a

modifier for signature moves, along with the choice of three distinctly different camera positions available on the fly, including a sweet panoramic view you can actually play in.

This is what I've wished Capcom would do with Street Fighter since Alpha, but Midway has beaten them to the punch. Perhaps this will be the game to reignite the kind of fervent fandom these franchises once enjoyed, but whether Capcom comes out to play or not, I'm now a card-carrying MK fan, and that's something I never

dreamt I'd say. Now if I could only play as Sonya... Dave Halverson

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

PlayStation 2

Point of Interest

In 1993, one Joseph Lieberman had a cow and went before congress citing a correlation between teen violence and video games, due in great part to Mortal Kombat.

Developer: Midway Los Angeles (Paradox) Publisher: Midway Online: None Available: Full

"Liu Kang and Kung Lao are among the most fluid and responsive characters I've ever had the pleasure of controlling."



Liu Kang strikes with enough ferocity to expel mass plasma.



Preview Gallery

Genji

PlayStation 2

Developer: Game Republic Publisher: Sony Available: fall

Developed by a new company spun off from a former key Capcom executive, Yoshiaki Okamoto, the samurai action game Genji will likely evoke thoughts of Onimusha upon first glance. The game is heavily hinged on all-out combat, with several characters taking center stage as you hack and slash your way through waves of enemy resistance. Just how deep the gameplay goes is up in the air, but one thing's for certain: Genji is a powerhouse in the visual category. While there doesn't seem to be anything spectacularly new about the game, we'll see where it goes from here... **Brady Flechter**



Urban Reign

PlayStation 2

Developer: Namco Publisher: Namco Available: Fall

Urban Reign seems to be inspired by the popularity of gritty American thug games, but behind the veneer is a four-player fighting engine created by some of the minds responsible for Tekken and Soul Calibur. Whether you're teaming up with a partner or duking it out against all comers in a free-for-all arena-style brawl, there's a heavy emphasis on crushing grapple moves and pain-inducing weapons—2x4s, broken bottles, etc.—that are strewn about the environments. No matter what you think of the subject matter, you have to admit it looks quite impressive. **Chris Hoffman**

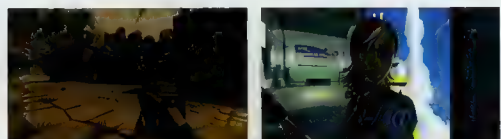


Perfect Dark Zero

Xbox 360

Developer: Rare Publisher: Microsoft Available: TBA

You've probably read some fairly negative opinions on Perfect Dark Zero and seen the screenshots and thought, "Wow, this doesn't look like I expected." At which point you should think, "Wow, this is the sequel to Perfect Dark, it's on new hardware, it's still early and probably prematurely shown, and I might want to wait passing judgment until the game is ready to be played in its final form." Plus, the new shots look good, and running around with an unprecedented amount of people online in an FPS=sign me up. **Brady Flechter**



Asterix & Obelix XXL 2: Mission Las Vegum

PlayStation 2, PC

Developer: Etranges Libellules Publisher: Atari UK Available: October (Europe)

There's no word yet on whether or not Asterix & Obelix XXL 2: Mission Las Vegum will make its way stateside, but seeing how its predecessor is one of Atari's best games of the last few years, one would certainly hope so. Especially since this one parodies the greatest icons in the gaming world, spanning 25 years of video game history. The game takes place in the Las Vegum theme park (Julius Caesar's version of Epcot) where Getatfix, the famous druid, is acting strangely, while all of the others have vanished, causing A&O to frolic through the districts of Little Paris, WCW, LuckSore, Little Venetia, Pirate Island and SeizeUs Palace to save the day. **Dave Halverson**



Wild Arms Alter Code: F

PlayStation 2

Developer: MediaVision/Sony Publisher: Agetec Available: Q3 2005

Wild Arms Alter Code: F, the remake of the great PlayStation neo-Western RPG, was originally scheduled for release last year before dropping off the radar and seeming to disappear. Fortunately, the game has re-emerged, and the delay was not for naught; Agetec is using the extra time to further polish the English translation that a game of this magnitude deserves. Although the visuals are a bit dated, Alter Code F is shaping up great in other regards, with new playable characters, redesigned puzzles and dungeons, new abilities and, of course, that famous whistling intro. **Chris Hoffman**

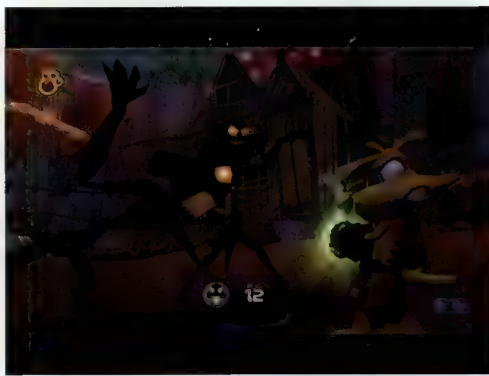


Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 3: Night of the Quinkan

PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox

Developer: Krome Publisher: Activision Available: Fall

As Ty's biggest (and maybe only) fan in the U.S. press, it wasn't easy to go off on Ty 2's problems—it was just too big (its heart was in the right, over-ambitious place)—but it had to be done to boot my friends at Krome back onto the path of Ty righteousness...which is right where they've landed with Ty 3. If anyone needed an otherworldly invasion, it was Ty's neck of the outback, and it's getting one in the form of the Quinkan: ghostly dark oppressors from a shadowy world. Good on ya! The vehicles and mecha return in a game that blends the intense play of the original with the open environments of Ty 2. **Dave Halverson**

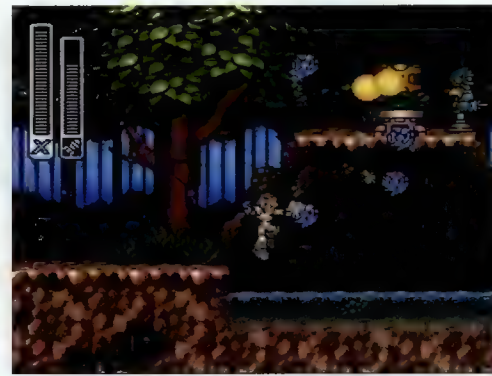


Mega Man X Collection

PlayStation 2, GameCube

Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Available: Fall

In case you didn't get enough classic Mega Man action with Anniversary Collection, Capcom is set to deliver even more adventures of their blue hero, this time with the darker, more mature (and at times not quite as polished) Mega Man X series. Featuring the first six chapters (originally on SNES and later PS1) of X and Zero's war against the evil Sigma and the Mavericks, along with bonus features and artwork, the collection's crown jewel will be Mega Man Battle and Chase: the PS1 racing game that was never released in the U.S.! **Chris Hoffman**



Prey

Xbox 360, PC

Developer: Human Head Publisher: 2K Games Available: 2006

How's this for a new idea on first-person shooter storytelling? An Indian mechanic named Tommy is mired in the boredom of the reservation, when aliens snap him back to life as he gets sucked into this wild world of doom. It's actually based on true lore, and the game it's unfolding through looks absolutely incredible. Developed off a new engine, Prey is a technological marvel at the very least, and it showcases what looks to be some mighty inventive gameplay along with the striking setting. One of the main hooks are portals, where monsters and you alike get sucked in and out of various times throughout the level. **Brady Flechter**



Rhapsodia

PlayStation 2

Developer: Konami Publisher: Konami Available: TBA

A spin-off of the Suikoden series, Rhapsodia is a tactical RPG set among the Island Nations of Suikoden IV. The game takes place around the same time period, featuring recognizable characters like King Lino En Kuldes, pirate Kika and more, but the primary stars are three newcomers: Kyriel, Andarc and Seneca. Magical runes will again play a big part in battle, casting attack spells or even flooding the field with elemental aura (which weakens the opposing element significantly). As of press time, Konami is evaluating the game for U.S. release and is likely to make an announcement very soon. **Chris Hoffman**



Preview Gallery

Crash Tag Team Racing

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GC

Developer: Radical Entertainment Publisher: VU Games Available: Fall

The first cart racer to (wisely) spill over from the track on to the trail, Crash Tag Team Racing is starting to look like a whole lot more than an attempt to extend the brand into the cart racing space, the places franchises usually go to die. Radical is at the helm, and seems to be hatching a game as sinister as Neo Cortex (who's back in his rightful place back on the dark side) trying to destroy Crash. The game features a spectacular array of vehicles and weapons, an ultra cool "Clashing" feature that actually combines cars, and a screenplay by Ren and Stimpy scribe Jordan Reichek, who helped make Twinsanity so awesome. **Dave Halverson**



Monster Madness

Xbox 360

Developer: Artificial Studios Publisher: TBA Available: Q1 2006 (UK)

3D top-down shooting makes its way to the 360...Monster Madness, where up to four players can shoot it out in all directions (including up or down) with hordes of ghouls, co-op or online. The game also features character-specific items that change the story arc accordingly: customizable weapons, the ability to drive abandoned vehicles (for some fine splattering) and advanced physics to create barricades and manipulate large objects with realistic mass. Environs include Suburban Nightmare, High School Hell and The Shopping Maul, each with deranged boss monsters that promise to be extra pulsating. Looks like the 360's got its Loaded. **Dave Halverson**



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Burnout Revenge

Art of the Crash

No one does crashes like Criterion Studios' team of demolition experts, but what about weaving all of that twisted metal into a cohesive racing whole? Here's Matt Webster, executive producer at Criterion, on how it's done... (Dave Halverson)

Burnout Revenge

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Point of Interest

There were an estimated 6,328,000 car accidents in the U.S. in 2003. The cost of these accidents exceeded 230 billion dollars.

Developer: Criterion Studios **Publisher:** EA

Online: 6p versus **Available:** September

Interview

Matt Webster

play: So it's payback time for the millions of people that sit on the nation's freeways for a third of their lives. With so much emphasis on carnage, is it a challenge balancing the action with the racing?

Matt Webster: I'm not going to lie to you, it's a huge challenge—but I think it's something that we've been able to nail in the past and really take to a new place in Burnout Revenge. When I hear people talk about Burnout, many of them say it's the only "racing" game they like...and I think that's because it's not just a racing game at heart.

The core experience has always been



The art of the crash begins here...

about battling with traffic and taking down your rivals—even though we really skewed towards designing the game as more of a racing experience. This time we're really focusing on rebuilding from the ground up to magnify the aggressive, battling experience...from the takedowns to the track design and progression system, it's now all about fighting and revenge.

The best Burnout moments aren't just about crossing the finish line first, but taking everyone out in a blaze of glory and crossing the finish line first! This core experience was at the heart of every design decision we made in Burnout Revenge. America, put away your guns; we have created a better way to ease your road rage!

In what ways will you be awarding players for rousting rubbernecks? Sounds like an all-out fight to the finish. What's the gist of the new game? We get Race and Crash mode; explain Road Rage and Revenge Mode...

This time your progression in the game is tied to your aggression. Battling with your rivals and taking revenge on rush-hour traffic is the only way to unlock the new cars, tracks and other surprises we have in store for you.

Traffic Attack is an all-new mode this year, and it's about all-out destruction. It's a race against the clock to lay waste to every vehicle in sight. Like most great games, it's all about turning deceptively simple concepts into deep, nuanced and addictive fun!

You're responsible for, hands down, the most spectacular crashes in all of

"Here's our secret: rent *Bad Boys II*. Terrible movie—amazing car crash sequences. Hollywood knows what they are doing. We're learning from them."

Matt Webster Executive producer, Criterion

"Cut! Perfect! That's a wrap!" Just another day at the office.



gaming. What's the secret to setting them up and making them look and feel so real?

Here's our secret: rent *Bad Boys II*. Terrible movie—amazing car crash sequences. Hollywood knows what they are doing. We're learning from them. We really aim to make crashes cinematic and spectacular. Well, that and the best artists, designers and programmers in the business, of course.

The Burnout engine for Xbox and PS2 is already out of control. Are you squeezing even more performance out of it this year? Any new techniques or features in particular we should look for?

Absolutely. We're constantly surprised at the performance we're able to squeeze from the current generation of hardware. Right now, we're showing how we can take the technology and deliver the very best visuals and gameplay experience that we can. We've tripled the amount of deformation in the car, the way that we are pushing the particle system is making these systems creak, and we're innovating in a host of other ways that we feel only this team can get to—just take a look at now Crash mode has been re-invented! Again, I can't give our team of artists, designers and programmers enough credit. **play**

Kingdom Under Fire HEROES

We can be heroes

The greatest achievement in action/strategy, brought to light by none so much as I, Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders caught enough fire for Microsoft to spin a sequel—no small task at the MGS factory. We caught up with series producer D. Lee to see exactly how much new armor-clashing, spell-casting action Phantagram has in store with Heroes. Dave Halverson

Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes

Xbox

Point of Interest

Phantagram is still planning to finish and release their amazing character adventure game, Strident.

Developer: Phantagram **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios **Online:** 6p co-op/versus **Available:** September



D. Lee Producer, Phantagram

INTERVIEW

play: The artwork in KUF is exquisite. What did you base the characters on? Were you inspired by any work in particular or just fascinated by medieval fantasy?

We spent a long time studying medieval fantasy (especially thanks to Tolkien). And all character designs were the result of our attempts in mixing every element that really fascinated us.

Korean games on the whole seem more meticulously designed and fleshed out, with an emphasis on strong character art and building a foundation for your worlds. Where does this spring from?

I must say it all came from cultural interchange. Being close to Japan and having an open-door mind toward Western culture really helps Korean game developers to see and design things in different ways.

How big is the KUF team? And do you work via deadline or just go until you

"...having an open-door mind toward Western culture really helps Korean game developers to see and design things in different ways."

D. Lee Producer, Phantagram



you wanted?

Heavy metal was something I had in mind even at the early phase of putting game concepts together. I wanted to have music that can help to increase the intensity of battle and pump up the adrenaline for hack-and-slash. Adding all these up? Heavy Metal was the answer for me.

Do we get new music in Heroes?

Yes. Maybe [they're] unheard of in the U.S., but there will be several new themes done by a famous Korean rock band called Crash.

I remember seeing the game at E3 2003 when it was at NC Soft. How did the game change from that point to the final Xbox version?

First of all, Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes (KUFH) is the completion from the previous versions. We have balanced the gameplay with action and RTS, but this time we have concentrated a bit more on action. In

the new era, internet connectivity and its popularity have increased significantly, and KUFH is ready to meet that expectation by offering up to six players on Xbox Live. It is amazing how players can enjoy the game with other players online with KUFH.

Is Heroes equally as exciting for Live users and those (like myself) who prefer single player?

Definitely! As I have mentioned above, Xbox Live offers up to six players at the same time, as well as other gameplay options like Troop Battle mode, Hero Battle mode and Invasion mode. Troop Battle mode consists of up to six players with one hero and their troops with action and RTS—exactly the same [as] the single player but even better. Hero Battle mode is pure action, hack-n-slash-type of gameplay, so that when players don't have much time, they have the chance to play KUFH with a quick hero battle mode without any troops to control. And lastly,

"Heavy metal was something I had in mind even at the early phase of putting game concepts together."

D. Lee Producer, Phantagram



with Invasion mode, players will have to defend their castle from numerous NPC AI. There are also other features such as spectator mode and replay mode. Spectator mode provides players with the chance to join a game session and observe how other players play, and for the replay, players can save their games and view [them] again to learn from their mistakes that they made throughout the game.

How many new single-player campaigns have been added?

Fifty new missions with seven new characters.

How about the environments? Might we see more structures in Heroes?

All maps in the new KUF have been newly designed from The Crusaders, and this time they will have more structures, height differences and weather variations. Something you can enjoy watching as you're wandering around the field.

Is the overworld exactly the same?

Sure would be awesome to see the characters walking around in real time getting set for battle...

I'd love to see that too. Perhaps in [the] next version of KUF.

I noticed Morene doing battle in one of the new screens. Will she be leading



troops into battle in Heroes? ...Love to see some vampire armies or minions.

Yes, Morene is one of the playable hero characters in both campaign and Xbox Live mode. And this time, she will command troops rather than getting summoned when needed. You might want to check out her signature moves, which have been dramatically enhanced from the Crusaders.

Lucretia, Gerald, Regnier...all in here? Any new, captains, dark elves, etc.?

Every one of the characters mentioned—Lucretia, Gerald, Regnier and Kendall—will appear in the event scenes and [be] playable in Xbox Live modes. In a new KUF, there will be a whole new line-up of heroes available.

Aside from the actual new scenarios themselves, have you changed or enhanced the graphics in any way?

Putting aside [the addition of] numerous action animations for new characters, we gave more details on character designs, variations on the map and boosts on special effects. I truly believe all these enhancements will deliver [a] more dynamic gaming experience to both old fans of KUF as well as newcomers.

I liked running around in battle looking for the leader to end battles quickly, especially when I was outnumbered. Will you emphasize this again?

Yes. During the battle, it's effective and wise to search for the enemy leader, take him or her out first, then the rest of enemies will just crumble down by a single stroke of the sword. The HP of leader and troop is interrelated. And this applies to your troops as well. Once your troop or hero dies, you won't be able to perform in full strength. Thus it's important to protect

both hero and troops for longer lasting battle.

Any changes to the actual gameplay itself?

While maintaining all the great battle RTS and action systems that The Crusaders was based on, the new KUF will deliver a more fast-paced and fierce action experience.

You're putting a ton of very beautiful models on screen at once in KUF. Is this a proprietary engine? Have you pretty much maxed out the capabilities?

All games being developed by us are using our custom-made engine called Blue. And

yes to your second question. With the KUF series, we already hit the maximum capacity of the current generation console.

Personally, I liked the fantasy voices with subtitles, before the English was put in. Any chance you will make this a feature?

Fantasy voices as in Korean language you mean? A new KUF will be simultaneously released worldwide supporting multiple languages, so please pick your "fantasy" voices at your taste.

Okay, now for the biggie. Are you considering an Xbox 360 version of KUF? Imagining how amazing this

would be keeps me awake at night...

Ha ha. Let's put it this way: It also keeps me awake at night trying to come up with concepts for a new Xbox 360 KUF.

And finally, what has become of Strident? The game is so beautiful!

We haven't killed the project. It's just on top of our pending list after KUF series. If anything gets finalized, I'll make sure you will be the first to know.

Keep up the great, great work. We sincerely appreciate you in America! You make the type of games we need more of.

Thanks! play



Rupert's mighty hammer has cracked more than a few ogres' skulls.





Dave Halverson
Editor in Chief

Dave critiques every game based on how well it hits its target audience, and has been practicing what he preaches in print for 13 years. He truly lives for his games. Within everything Dave writes, you will also find a little bit of his personal love of the art of gaming and game creation, the driving force in his life outside of music and actual human interaction.

Favorite genres: Platformers, adventure, motocross, action-RPGs, 2D
Now playing: Advance Wars DS, Death Jr.
Favorite Coin-op: Tie: Battletoads (Rare) and Wild Riders (Sega WOW)



Brady Fiechter
Executive Editor

Brady feels that when you've been playing video games since video games were invented, you tend to start to look past the unnecessary need to boil a game down to its mechanical parts and start to see the artistry and spirit of imagination that goes into its creation. It's never as simple as polygons and cool explosions.

Favorite genres: Adventure, first-person shooters, action, RPGs
Now playing: Killer 7
Favorite Coin-op: Tie: Devastators (Konami) and Star Wars (Atari)



Chris Hoffman
Senior Editor

Chris is extremely loyal to his gaming roots, and doesn't believe that just because a game (or concept) is old it isn't any good. On the contrary, Chris thinks that more of the same only better is definitely a good thing, although he's always looking for new experiences to take gaming to new heights. Squirrel army status: still recruiting.

Favorite genres: RPGs, action, adventure, fighting, wrestling
Now playing: WWE Day of Reckoning 2
Favorite Coin-op: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Konami)

Reviews

August 2005

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Mike Griffin
PC Editor

Even as a wee lad playing Zaxxon on Coleco, the technology and artistry of game design has always fascinated Mike. He thinks some games are timeless in that respect, whether 2D, 3D, flat-shaded or bump mapped. Mike's goal is to equip the readers with accurate information, so that limited funds and time can be put to good use.

Favorite genres: MMORPGs, first-person shooters, action-adventure
Now playing: Battlefield 2
Favorite Coin-op: Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara (Capcom)



Ashley "Veela" Esqueda
Associate Editor

To Ashley, video games are like magnificent pieces of art: you don't break down the piece as a whole to comment on the brush stroke method or colors used. She thanks her mother for playing Castlevania II after school, and everyone in elementary school for shunning her, because without them, her obsession with gaming would not have been possible.

Favorite genres: Action, RPG, adventure
Now playing: Guild Wars
Favorite Coin-op: DDR 3rd Mix (Konami)



Michael Hobbs
Art Director

A gamer since Space Invaders, Michael has a soft spot for 2D shooters and other games that directly engage the player. Nintendo certainly ranks high on his list of favorite developers, and though recent forays into the world of MMORPGs have rather consumed him, he'll always have time for a game of Bangaiō.

Favorite genres: Action, racing, adventure, alternative, shooters
Now playing: Conker: Live and Reloaded
Favorite Coin-op: Starblade (Namco)

play magazine

GAME of the MONTH

Darkwatch

014

We gave out four 9s this month, but Jericho and company took the prize. The combination of tactical shooting and adventure together with a seldom-seen level of art proved unbeatable.

Rating System

Our scores represent both a game's technical merits and our personal opinions based on our expertise within each genre, of which the numbers alone do not necessarily tell the whole story. A perfect 10 represents a game that is flawless in the reviewer's opinion. Such a high standard means that 10s will be incredibly rare, but when it happens, it symbolizes that this game isn't just the very best—it's the best of the best.

- 10 Perfect
- 9 Extraordinary
- 8 Great
- 7 Good
- 6 Decent
- 5 Average
- 4 Below average
- 3 Poor
- 2 Bad
- 1 Terrible

They're (almost) ba-ack...

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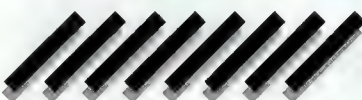
TBD, but it will be something good



MEDAL OF HONOR EUROPEAN ASSAULT

A once-great series is solid but tired

"There's little to Medal of Honor: European Assault filled with surprise, but you can't deny the moments of engaging intensity..."



There's nothing like a well-worn shotgun in an FPS...



Remove the authentic war footage and inconsequential narrative mission introductions and Medal of Honor: European Assault could have been any generic first-person shooter, in which one faceless enemy after another pops out of every nook and cranny of big set pieces, converging for the familiar kill. The persistently fading World War II theme has never felt so grafted on in this series. Rumbling tanks, winding trenches, stick grenades and shouts to "kill the Germans!" just don't have the inherent excitement or emotion they once did when a real-world war was inspiration rather than obligation.

And yet the game works, because its craft and skill are high enough to entertain, even when the series feels like retirement is calling. There's little to Medal of Honor: European Assault filled with surprise, but you can't deny the moments of engaging intensity, like hunkering down to defend an onslaught on a German farm while trapped in a barn, or the run-and-gun shotgun shootout down the narrow bunkers of an African stranglehold or the mad dash to set explosives in a Russian munitions factory. Some areas are more entertaining

than others, but they all are well designed and offer interesting visual appeal.

New to the series is the deployment of a three-man squad, which is controlled through a simple stay-or-charge command. You're rewarded with health packs if you keep your allies alive to the end of the mission—not the easiest task given their penchant for stupidity. Don't be surprised if you find your team a needless distraction—their use is fairly limited and cumbersome—but as poor as the AI can be, its presence can be fun and adds a certain element of urgency to the action. The game would lose some flavor without them.

I have no problem with linearity in game design, but next to last year's rigid Medal of Honor: Rising Sun, this sequel does benefit from open battlefields that offer you primary and secondary objectives, established for strategic tackling. I like that the areas are fairly small and intricate, especially near the end, when you're caught up in some pretty intense firefights that require glacial advancement. And I've always liked the way this series has controlled, the way the antique weapons leave an exceptionally satisfying mark.

For a game that is striving for an air of emotional authenticity to its killing, there are some odd choices that diminish the theme even more. Boss battles with health meters feel like a strictly fantasy action experience, and the addition of an adrenaline meter is nonsensical. Not that any of this is poorly executed. Medal of Honor: European Assault is a mostly successful game that feels like it's simply bored of its own existence. Brady Fiechter

Medal of Honor: European Assault

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

7.5
Score

Interesting locations and well-designed stages.

Enemies are more positionally engaging than providing smart AI.

Developer: EA GAMES Publisher: Electronic Arts

Online: None Available: June



Grand Theft Auto SAN ANDREAS

An interesting place to visit, but you might not want to live there

I'd been waiting a long time to play Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas on Xbox. Not because I'm a big fan of the series and was eager for this enhanced version, but because I'd somehow managed to avoid the PS2 release and, after so much praise and such massive sales, I'd finally get to see what I was missing. Considering the hype, I was expecting some kind of gameplay epiphany. I didn't get it, but it's easy to see why San Andreas is such a phenomenon.

San Andreas, in a word, is alive: a complete, living, breathing, enormous world that seemingly has no boundaries (and no load times as long as you remain outdoors), filled with weather patterns, an active populace and thorough infrastructure. It does a disturbingly realistic job of recreating California and Nevada; I've actually been stuck behind one of those massive traffic jams in Santa Monica that happens for no reason. It's almost incomprehensible that people could program such a vast world with so many details—bathrooms in fast food restaurants, for example, or the

simple cracks in miles and miles of street asphalt—but it's not without trade-offs. A lot of textures look rough up close, the models aren't nearly up to Xbox spec (the primary characters should at least have fully modeled hands), and system-specific features like bump mapping weren't utilized. At least it has custom soundtracks, but better control over what plays would have been nice.

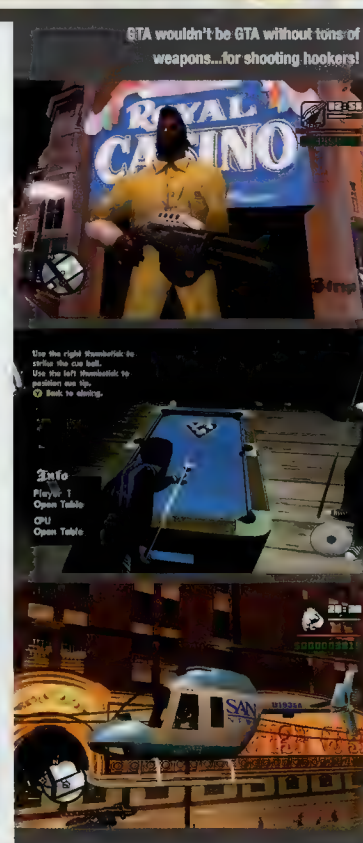
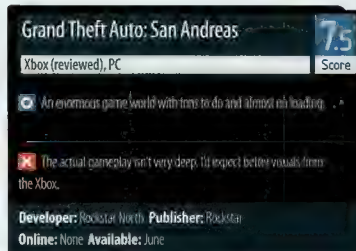
Of course, this complete, living, breathing, enormous world is one that's designed around theft, murder, prostitution, gang warfare and lots of carjacking, along with many less criminal pursuits, including racing, eliminating crime, fighting fires and performing deliveries. There's a ton of mission variety, but whatever your pleasure, you're going to be doing a lot of driving to specified points on the map and entering a lot of red circles to initiate a lot of scripted events. The actual gameplay in all these missions isn't particularly compelling, and the AI is none too bright (which actually recreates LA traffic perfectly), but what it lacks in mechanics it somewhat makes up for with



"...A COMPLETE, LIVING, BREATHING, ENORMOUS WORLD THAT SEEMINGLY HAS NO BOUNDARIES..."

a gripping story and superb voice acting. This is a game that's all about storytelling, attitude, presentation and style. If that's the kind of game you're looking for, well, you probably don't need me to tell you that San Andreas should be your new home.

Chris Hoffman



Makai Kingdom

Chronicles of the Sacred Tome
If you love strategy-RPGs, you just turned the right page

Legions of characters fill each battlefield.

If Disgaea and Phantom Brave got together and spawned a game, Makai Kingdom: Chronicles of the Sacred Tome would be their lovechild. Nippon Ichi brings an innovative (and slightly strange) SRPG to the table with Makai Kingdom, and fans of the genre are sure to live happier with this new chapter in strategy-RPGs.

Lord Zetta has lost his Underworld... After a reading by Oracle Pram (letting him know that his netherworld would be destroyed), Zetta goes to double-check this startling news with the mystical Sacred Tome. After seeing that the prophecy is indeed true, our dear Lord Zetta flips out and attacks the book, destroying his Netherworld in the process, and binding his spirit into the Tome itself.

You begin the tale in a hub of operations, with only Lord Zetta to guide you as you create an army by imbuing inanimate objects with the souls of standard SRPG character classes (healers, fighters, mages, thieves, etc.). Your arsenal choices are far from ordinary though; I equipped my thief with a UFO (yes, as in flying saucers!). Also added into Makai are vehicles, rocket launchers and mechs, along with your daily variety SRPG fare like swords and books.

Makai Kingdom's battle system is odd in that you feel like you've used it before, yet it still feels fresh. New to the turn-based system is the addition of the Invite command, allowing you to bring in vehicles, characters and facilities filled with soldiers at any point during battle. With a maximum of eight characters at any time on the field, and three facilities to fill up, it

sure makes for some strategy-filled battles. Sometimes you'll fight waves of enemies that attempt to wear you down through attrition, and the facilities come in handy. The random map generation keeps battle fresh and quick-paced as you fight through the masses of monsters in each Demon Lord's netherworld.

The music and voiceover is where I'm conflicted... I'm *really* picky about good VO in a game, and music is something that can really take a game into nirvana. Unfortunately, the music in MK gets repetitive, fast...and the VO was so awful that I found myself muting the TV, pretending I was watching a Korean soap opera, and inserting my own VOs. Pram sounded like a valley girl, and one of the male Demon Lords was so effeminate that it kind of removed me from the story itself. For fans of Nippon Ichi's previous titles, though, you'll love it. It's weird and silly, and the translations make for some hilarious English VO.

While I wouldn't recommend this one to casual gamers, Makai Kingdom brings a fresh chapter to the stagnant SRPG genre, and fans of Nippon Ichi (or SPRGs) will enjoy it. If you're expecting a few standard clichés, over-the-top VO and an in-depth turn-based SRPG, Makai Kingdom is worth taking a turn on. Ashley Esqueda



Makai Kingdom: Chronicles of the Sacred Tome **7.0**
PlayStation 2 **Score**
The Invite system and introduction of facilities make for some really interesting battle strategies... this is SRPGing at its finest.
Voiceover is way over the top... care in point: Lord Zetta whining, "Sacred Tome? More like... sucky... book... thingy!"
Developer: Nippon Ichi Software **Publisher:** NIS America
Online: None **Available:** June



"...brings a fresh chapter to the stagnant SRPG genre..."



Review Gallery



Batman Begins
PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Developer: Eurocom Publisher: Electronic Arts Online: None Available: June
Score: 7.5

To a lesser degree, the Batman Begins game does for the video game franchise what the film does for the movie franchise: save its flapping ass from the pits of bad movie hell, where *Batman and Robin* rules on high alongside rubbish like *Batman: Dark Tomorrow*. The decision to go stealth was a good one, and even though scripted and prompted, the gameplay hits the broad mark. Casual users will find *Batman Begins* surprisingly doable, while skilled players can pull from the game's neatly packaged scenarios, unearthing the layers of skill-based maneuvers woven into the melee, platforming and fear-inducing gameplay—an altogether new and intriguing device for evening up the odds. So he walks funny—this is a cool *Batman* game—makes me happy Dave Halverson




“...skilled players can pull from the game's neatly packaged scenarios...”



FlatOut
PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC
Developer: Bugbear Entertainment
Publisher: VU Games
Online: 64 Verses
Available: July
Score: 7.0

When you've had enough of the polite racing in *GT4* and *Forza* and simply must leave a trail of carnage on the track, you may want to turn your vicious gaze upon *FlatOut*. This casually entertaining racing game is as much about smashing as it is pure racing skill, yet part of its success is a decent balance between the two, with decent AI and physics keeping you locked into a proper mode of strategy. The track itself is often a hazard as well, each themed with some nasty hazard point that, properly utilized, can be the difference between a win or a loss. Upgrades on the variety of cars gradually up the speeds and intensity. Brady Flechter



Fantastic Four
PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
Developer: Seven Studios
Publisher: Activision
Online: None
Available: July
Score: 6.5

Aside from way too many button prompts (standing in colored cylinders and pressing buttons to trigger actions) and continuity problems—*The Thing* runs into a parked motorcycle and it doesn't move an inch, yet he can toss it like a *Hot Wheel*—*FF* has some redeeming qualities: namely Mr. Fantastic, a few memorable bosses, a strong upgrade system, and the odd compelling mission...otherwise, it's pretty much by the numbers. The models up close are unsightly, the cinemas grainy and the music has all the luster of a *Tide* commercial, but the game on the whole is entertaining by movie game standards. Dave Halverson



RPG Maker 3 is much more user-friendly than the previous edition, but this relative ease of use comes at a price: less customizability. You can still make sizeable overworlds, legions of characters and monsters, complex plots, vast dungeons and any items you can dream up, but you can't actually create your own characters or environments from scratch or design your own textures; you're pretty much limited to heavily Lord of the Rings-inspired fantasy. Within those constraints, however, RPG Maker 3 is a great tool with features like hard drive and keyboard support, wonderful music and the ability to create conversation cutscenes. There's still a massive learning curve, but it's about as accessible as a program of this type can be. *Chris Hoffman*

"Within those constraints, however, RPG Maker 3 is a great tool with features like hard drive and keyboard support..."



I own the PC version of Sid Meier's Pirates!, so I was curious to see how well the controls and graphics ported to a console. I was pleasantly surprised to find that graphically, the game looks almost identical to its PC counterpart. Although the controls took a while to get used to (it'll take time for you keyboard/mouse enthusiasts), wooing the governor's daughter has become much easier on Xbox, and navigating the ship is smooth sailing. I'd still like to see the ability to create a female pirate (because ladies can be good captains, too!). The open seas have never looked better for aspiring Xbox scalawags...so grab your parrot and screw on your peg leg...Pirates is here on Xbox! *Ashely Esqueda*



What praise hasn't been heaped upon Tim Schafer's artistic masterpiece Psychonauts? Raz and his shenanigans at the Whispering Rock Psychic Summer Camp had me at hello. The PS2 version is nothing short of a miracle...Budcat really got the most out of the machine. Graphically, the game is beautiful...it's only a slight downgrade from the Xbox/PC versions. Most of the detail's still there, with lesser-than-Xbox quality for the water (especially), normal maps, textures and panoramas, but the wonderful story and gameplay shine through with manageable (just) load times. Raz, Sasha, Ford Crueller, Milla and the rest of the gang look just as gorgeous for the PS2 masses. This port's still brilliant, still mind-bending and (certainly) still Psychonauts. *Ashley Esqueda*



"The PS2 version is nothing short of a miracle..."

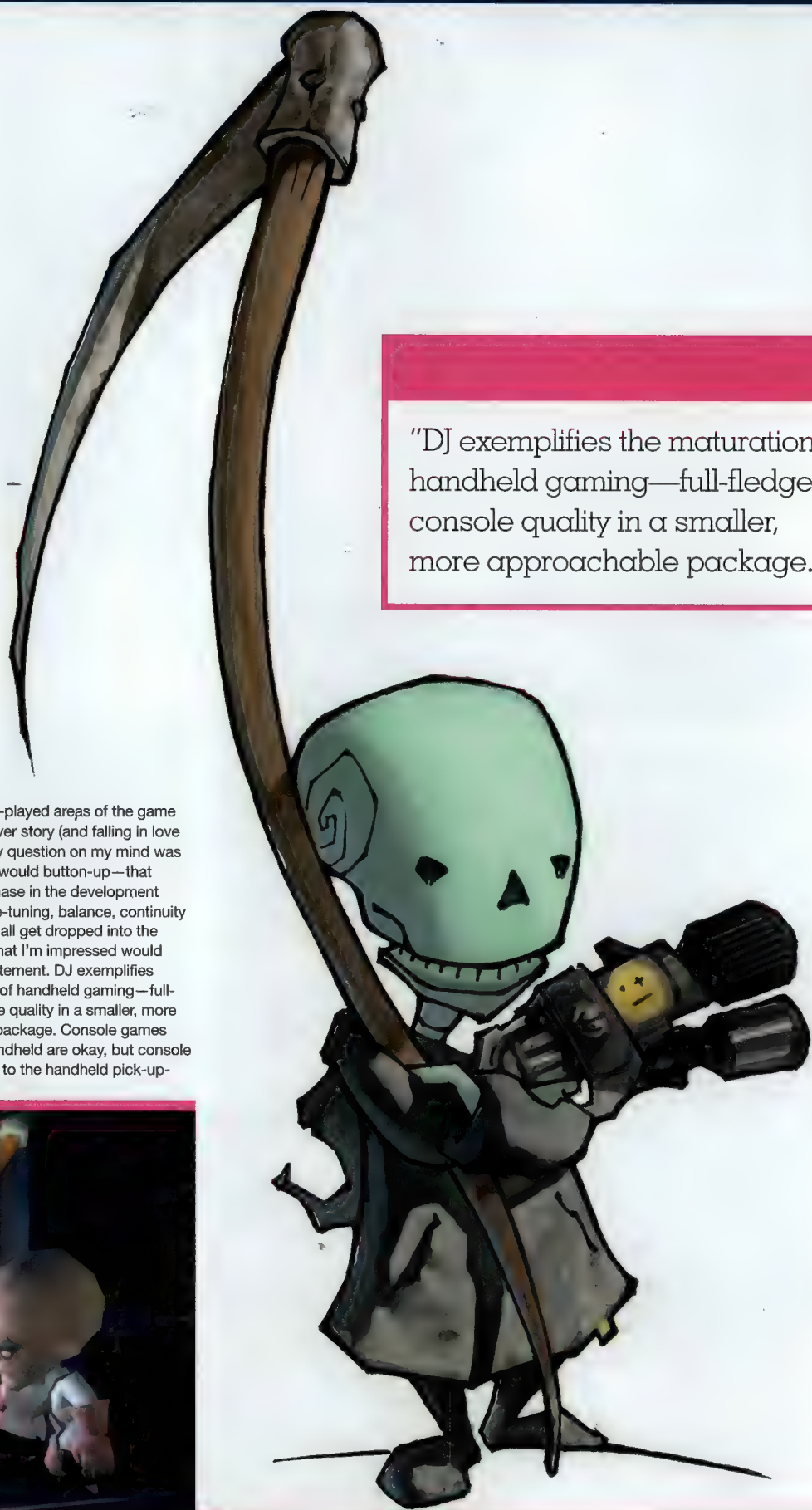
Death Jr.

Field trippin'

Of all the PSP games on the horizon, Death, Jr. definitely has the most buzz on it...has since Backbone let their pint-sized bonehead out of the bag. But is it simply because we relish the thought of playing as the Grim Reaper's progeny, or is there a deeper attraction, perhaps that Tim Burton/Robert Zemeckis gene that seems to lull people into a warm campy rapture? Growing up on shows like *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* (ah, remember when TV was actually cool?), this stuff just crawls up and parks on my mental front lawn, but with DJ, there's more to it than my fascination with a dead kid who hangs out with conjoined twins, a dead guppy, a quadruple amputee in a jar, a black-eyed mischief-maker and an over-achiever who bleeds from the hands when she gets nervous. What I really dig about DJ is that he was created specifically for PSP: a portable that up until now has been treated like a PS2 surplus warehouse. Of course, it also helps that DJ was birthed at a studio housing inmates inspired enough to reap what their design doc has sown.

Having spot-played areas of the game for our May cover story (and falling in love with it), the only question on my mind was how the game would button-up—that most critical phase in the development cycle when fine-tuning, balance, continuity and final audio all get dropped into the batter. To say that I'm impressed would be an understatement. DJ exemplifies the maturation of handheld gaming—full-fledged console quality in a smaller, more approachable package. Console games adapted for handheld are okay, but console technology put to the handheld pick-up-

"DJ exemplifies the maturation of handheld gaming—full-fledged console quality in a smaller, more approachable package."



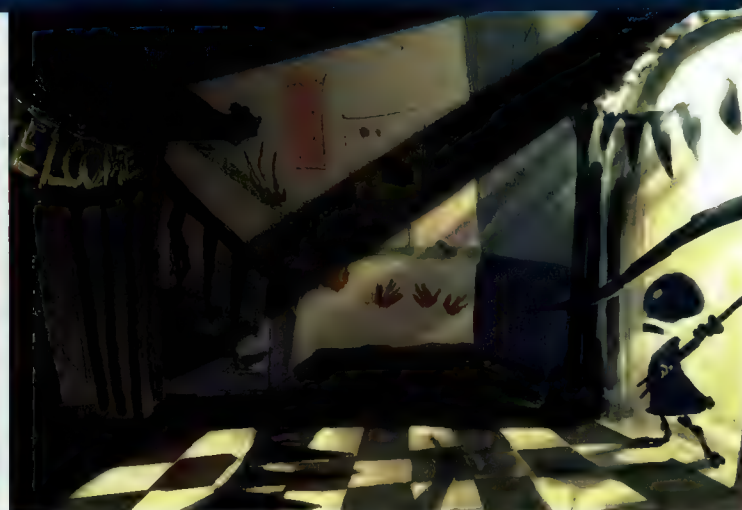
and-play philosophy are much cooler. DJ is instantly palpable—strafe, lock-on, shoot, collect, jump...and loads of fun right out of the gate—yet underneath lurk big-game attributes as fast in coming as they are gratifying.

Multiple weapons are doled out by erstwhile twins Smith and Weston, gun combos become an obsession, and control nuances pour out of the coffer at a brisk clip.

DJ's scythe is one handy murder weapon; wire slides, ledge grabs, and hook- and rafter-swings are all on the menu as the game oscillates between manic shooting (certain enemies are wicked fast) and platforming. Pacing, gameplay and especially music (Bob Baffa wasn't kidding when he talked about giving the music

You'll be dying to get one of these...

Exclusive to EB and GameStop, the Death, Jr. Limited Edition comes with a special silver/foil variant cover, two DJ UMD cases and a CD containing both a DJ comic and soundtrack to download to your PSP memory stick.



character) are all thumbs way up. My sole grievance with DJ is that his reticule trails behind him, so spinning around and locking on to enemies behind him is tricky business, and he's hard to center when you're trying to position the camera. I learned quickly that it's important to lay back or retreat when certain enemies appear and deal with them from afar, rather than rush in to a legion of Eyeballers (nasty little slugs with killer aim) and attempt to slice and dice... at least until you've amassed a few guns (of seven) and a smock-load of C4 hamsters. Be on the lookout for Weapons Widgets too; Smith and Weston don't take American Express.

DJ achieves guilty pleasure status from

the get-go, hits critical mass after one lap around the hub and is pretty much video game Crazy Glue for the duration. I was in love with the premise from day one, now I'm a believer in the whole rancid enchilada.

Dave Halverson

Death, Jr.		9.0
PSP		Score
<p>Character action at its finest, DJ has it all: great gameplay, great music, a truly inspired cast.</p>		
<p>The reticule drags a bit, which takes some adjustment, and it's easy to get turned around in tight spaces.</p>		
Developer: Backbone Entertainment		Publisher: Konami
Multiplayer: None		Available: August





Sigma Star Saga

The evolution of the shooter

Sigma Star Saga is the best thing to happen to shooters in a long time. Combining a traditional, 2D, side-scrolling shooter in the vein of Gradius or R-Type with a full-fledged action-RPG is certainly unusual, but it's an ingenious concept that's pulled off incredibly well. It's also exactly what's needed for a genre that admittedly isn't as popular as it was years ago.

At the heart of this adventure is Earthing pilot Ian Recker, sent into enemy territory as a double agent to infiltrate the supposedly evil Krill Empire and destroy it from within. Aside from paving the way to an elaborate, twist-filled plot in which Ian's loyalties are torn between Earth and the Krill—and also between sexy love interests Pysme and Scarlet—Ian's association with aliens is a perfect device to establish logical game mechanics. Ian's parasitic battle suit is a cool concept that looks great visually and makes perfect sense in the context of the game, and while being randomly warped from a planet's surface into space combat and back might sound weird, it's executed in a way that seems completely natural.

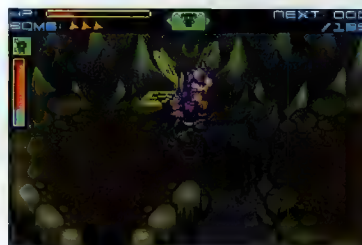
Gameplay itself is divided between on-foot exploration/combat and aerial shooter action. On foot, the game is as fulfilling as any action-RPG out there, with well-designed worlds and Zelda-style gadgets

that open the way to new areas (and often new weapons) and evolving gameplay. Unfortunately, you don't gain experience from field combat, meaning there's really no reason to fight the enemies. For action, it's much better to turn to the side-scrolling shooter segments, offered both as random battles (which include some wicked boss-like encounters) and lengthier missions that usually punctuate each chapter. The gameplay doesn't exactly have the depth of Radiant Silvergun, but it's fun and fast-paced, made all the better by more than 70 gun enhancements. With variations on the cannon (spread shot, vertical shot, free aim, etc.), bullet type (wave, charge shot, seeker missiles) and shot impact (shrapnel, barrier, bullet eater and more), thousands of combinations are possible.

Added to all this are solid writing, great

“...the best thing to happen to shooters in a long time.”

The battle begins on Earth, but you won't stay there long.



anime-style character designs—dare I say the best I've seen from an American developer—and bold, colorful visuals, complete with a nifty indoor lighting effect. I can think of ways the game could have been better—I don't see why you can't change weapons in battle, for example—but I still could hardly put this game down. This is one of the best original GBA games out there. **Chris Hoffman**



Sigma Star Saga

Game Boy Advance

85

Score

The best aspects of action-RPGs and side-scrolling shooters combined into one game.

Too bad you can't level-up on foot or change weapons in battle.

Developer: Wayforward Publisher: Namco

Multiplayer: None Available: July

054 August 2005

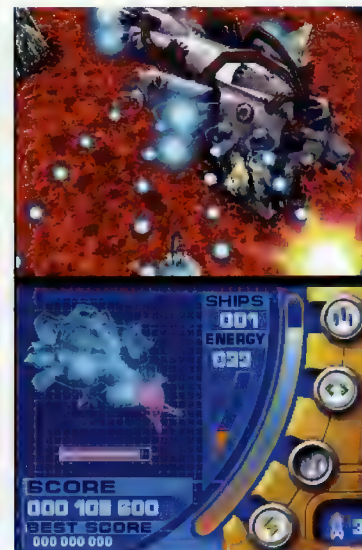


Nanostray

Scramble your DSs

With everyone so hung up on big-budget 20-plus-hour-long 3D yawn-fests (for the most part), the “video game” has all but died off—those hour-to-three-hour-long games you’d fall so in love with you’d play them for weeks on end. They take about a year to make, (would) retail somewhere in the neighborhood of \$29.99 (like Nanostray) and provide a pure gameplay experience. While we see fewer and fewer of these on console, the DS is about to enter a period of supremacy on the backs of traditional action games, on top of the magnetic pick-up-and-play titles that take advantage of its special powers. While puzzle and/or novelty games are certainly a crazy fun way to pass the hours, when was the last time you held a glorious 3D shooter in your hands? Not glorious by handheld standards, but in the vein of Raystorm, Axelay or Silpheed? I don’t think people have any idea how great a shooter is waiting in the wings, or what the DS is capable of when operating outside the realm of novelty... I didn’t. Not until I played Nanostray.

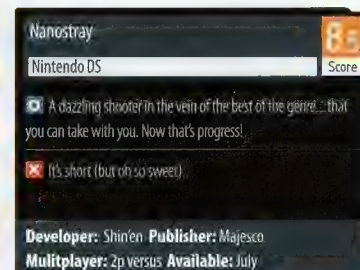
Shin’en (one of a handful of premier shooter makers in the world) has isolated every great technique in the shooter bible and harnessed it within their own design, utilizing beam gates, rotation, dynamic trajectory, level-specific armadas dispatching all manner of wave- and pattern-based ships, bravado boss battles and interactive environments while keeping the enemy fire bright and the patterns doable. You won’t beat every stage the first time through (ship quantities don’t reset between stages), but as you get to know your weapons stockpile—available on the



“I don’t think people have any idea how great a shooter is waiting in the wings, or what the DS is capable of...”

touchscreen, along with boss scanning—and sub weapons—active via a spill gauge that slowly replenishes as you collect blue debris—along with how to deal with each specific armada, Nanostray becomes a spellbinding shooter accompanied by the kind of dreamy soundtrack this industry has all but forgotten. I order you to wear headphones (or ear buds, if you’re feeling sadistic) when you play Nanostray. The music obliterates 95 percent of what’s out there on console.

Additionally, beating each level in Adventure Mode opens up Arcade Mode and level-specific challenges in Challenge Mode, and there’s some great multiplayer head-to-head in here too, so, although short (its main Achilles’ heel), Nanostray is highly replayable. It’s also insanely beautiful. I’ll wear this cart out; it’s just a remarkable old-school shooter. **Dave Halverson**



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

Nintendo DS

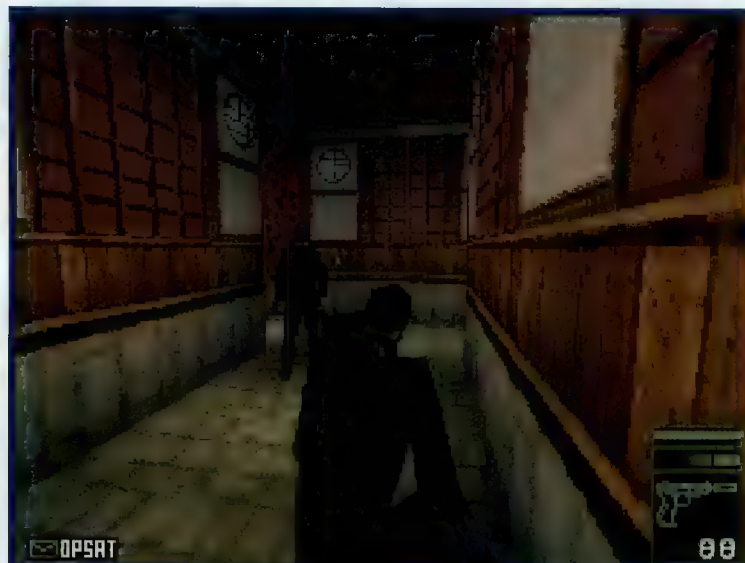
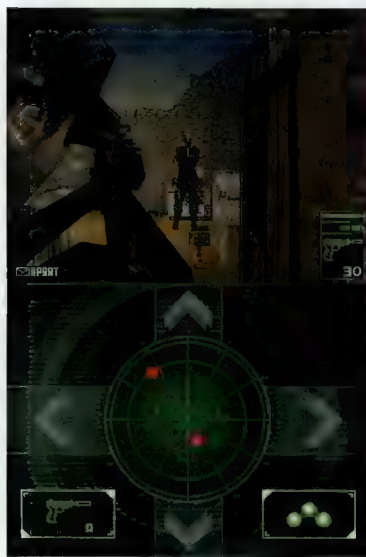
6.5

Score

Developer: Gameloft Publisher: Ubisoft Multiplayer: 4p co-op/versus Available: June

Chaos, sadly, gets lost in translation as super-spy Sam Fisher takes the leap to Tinytown and the Nintendo DS. Instead of bathing Fisher in pools of murky, swirling darkness, the best the game can do is present blobs of varying lightness and then hammer home the notion of concealment

with a stealth meter charting the degree to which the hero is cloaked. With much of the atmosphere neatly excised by the DS' technical limitations, Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory plods along as sort of a poor man's Metal Gear Solid, one that's further hampered by a control scheme not quite



It's not the console versions, but the 3D ain't bad for DS.

conductive to the action. Sneaking up on unwitting guards must be accomplished either by tapping on the DS' D-pad or the left shoulder button, and neither allows for the sort of seamless and fluid stealth required to catch a goon unaware. Although buoyed by a nice touch-screen look system and a fine series of multiplayer options, the reality is that this theory rests on ground most shaky. **Greg Orlando**



Disney's Magical Quest 3 starring Mickey and Donald

Game Boy Advance

7.0

Score

Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Multiplayer: 2p co-op/versus Available: June

I've been waiting a long time for this game to come out in North America—it came out in Japan nearly 10 years ago on the Super Famicom—and while I can't say it was worth the wait, it does deliver a charming 2D platform adventure the likes of which we rarely get anymore. As with its predecessors, multiple costumes with unique abilities (Mickey and Donald even have distinct powers of their own) add technique, depth and strategy



to what would otherwise be a basic platformer, and the seven traditionally themed stages (desert, ice, underwater, forest, etc.) are ideal for exploration and filled with secrets. It's made for kids and nothing spectacular, but old-school platform fans will eat it up. **Chris Hoffman**

Mega Man Battle Network 5: Team Protoman/Team Colonel

Game Boy Advance

7.0

Score

Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Multiplayer: 2p versus (links with Boktai 2) Available: June

For this installment of the Mega Man Battle Network series, Capcom has actually made noteworthy changes to the game, specifically with the addition of liberation missions, which feature new playable characters and almost play like a turn-based strategy game. These missions are among the toughest parts of any Battle Network game, but definitely add some freshness. In other regards, MMBNS plays like the previous games, with a



He's a strong one, no doubt about it.



good mix of action and strategy, plus loads of character customization options and weapons, but the isometric level design is once again pretty dull. Of course, fans might just want to wait for the DS version later this year, which combines the features of both GBA variants into one complete title. **Chris Hoffman**

Yoshi Topsy-Turvy

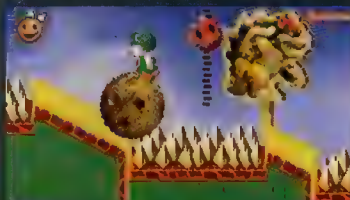
Game Boy Advance

6.5

Score

Developer: Artoon Publisher: Nintendo Multiplayer: None Available: June

I admit that I was more than a little concerned when I started playing Yoshi Topsy-Turvy, fearful that the push for innovation and gimmickry of the gyrosensor would interfere with solid gameplay. Fortunately, those fears were for nothing, as the ability to shift gravity about 45 degrees in either direction actually does augment the traditional platforming and enemy devouring that Yoshi is known for; yes, you still control Yoshi the old-fashioned



way for the most part. What does hold the game back a bit is a design that emphasizes collecting items or similar objectives within small stages instead of focusing on grand level design and epic boss battles, though the game is still decent. But where's Yoshi's egg-hrning ability? **Chris Hoffman**

Meteos

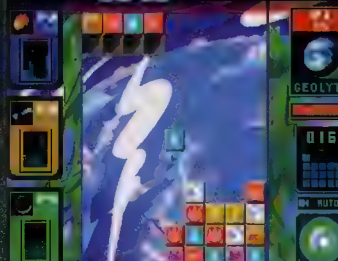
Nintendo DS

9.0

Score

Developer: Q Entertainment Publisher: Nintendo Multiplayer: 4p versus (single cart) Available: June

Let me put it this way: I recently fired up Meteos with the intent to play for 10 minutes, and I ended up playing for more than an hour. I haven't played a puzzle game this addictive since Tetris, doubtlessly due in part to Meteos' similar gut-wrenching system of risks versus rewards; do you line up and launch those blocks right now or wait to achieve a bigger combo? What Meteos



offers that other puzzle games don't is a fantastic intensity level and gratifying quick-response controls that only the DS' touchscreen can deliver—perfect for sending blocks back en masse from whence they came and creating massive combos—along with evolving rules for each distinct level, great aesthetics and multiple endings. **Chris Hoffman**

Bomberman

Nintendo DS

8.0

Score

Developer: Hudson Soft Publisher: Ubisoft Multiplayer: 8p versus (single cart) Available: June

As a multiplayer game, Bomberman for DS is excellent. Not only does it up the ante with a two-screen playfield and nearly 30 match types (including normal deathmatch, capture the crown, trap stages and paint modes) plus numerous options on each, but it supports eight players at once and only requires one copy of the game. If you have DS-playing friends, the fun



(swearing, hilarity, etc.) will last for hours—the more the merrier. As usual, the single-player mode is less exciting—even with many new power-ups and the ability to activate them at any time via the touchscreen, the game feels a lot like it did years ago and gets old fast—but multiplayer is what it's all about. **Chris Hoffman**

Kirby: Canvas Curse

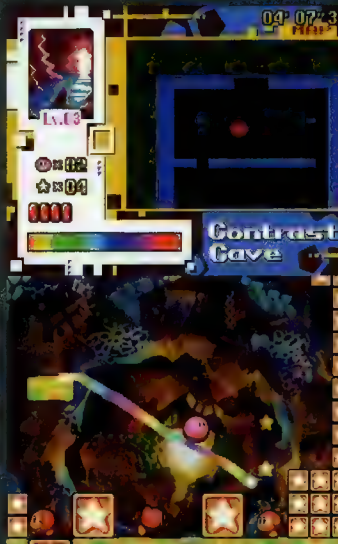
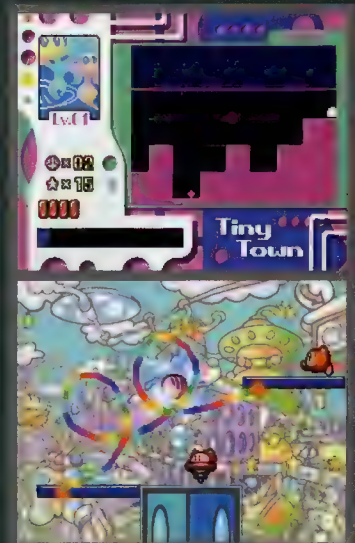
Nintendo DS

6.5

Score

Developer: Hal Laboratories Publisher: Nintendo Multiplayer: None Available: June

Kirby: Canvas Curse seems to have it all: fantastically colorful sketchbook visuals, absorbing level design, loads of abilities to acquire, tons of bonus features and unlockables. As to whether or not these actually add up to an enjoyable game, well, I guess that all depends on if you want to actually control Kirby or if you're content drawing lines, initiating dashes and prodding enemies while the



puff-ball hero rolls around the screen. Creating ramps and loop-de-loops is fun for a while, but for me, it wasn't nearly as exciting as directly controlling the character, especially since the gameplay doesn't evolve a whole lot. It's innovative for sure, but for me, that's not enough. Your mileage may vary. **Chris Hoffman**

Coded Arms

PSP

6.5
Score

Developer: Konami Publisher: Konami Multiplayer: 4p versus Available: July

Coded Arms takes place in a virtual reality wasteland, where futuristic cities, cavernous warehouses and decaying temples arise as a nifty cyber dystopia. The game does a good job of selling its world, providing slick little details like visual "glitches" and enemies and chunks of level destroyed by errant fire dissolving into a shower of code. The Japanese fascination with the bleakly artificial is alive and well, but unfortunately, so is their inexperience with the first-person shooter genre. Coded Arms is designed as mechanically as the staid progression of its theme, with every randomly generated level unwinding through one elevator-hall-block room after



another. Door opens, virtual alien soldier and bot unloads its weapon, drops health and ammunition after the kill, off you go to the next portal and the next increasingly generic section. Taking the pressure off the monotony are light RPG elements; I enjoyed collecting gear and feeling my experience enhance the attributes. Played in small chunks and enlivened by multiplayer, Coded Arms can offer a distractive appeal, but the imprecision of the PSP control scheme within the game's incongruous design will be enough to keep a demanding player away. **Brady Fiechter**



Dead to Rights: Reckoning

PSP

5.0
Score

Developer: Rebellion Publisher: Namco Multiplayer: 4p versus Available: June

As a straightforward action experience, Dead to Rights: Reckoning could have been a fun, mindless shoot-'em-until-they're-dead-then-shoot-'em-some-more action game, but some problems hold it back in the form of an almost uncontrollable camera and lock-on targeting that seems to have a mind of its own. Blame it on the lack of a second analog stick, but the game is filled with moments where enemies pop out and start blasting away while your back is turned, and all you can do is lock on, shoot, execute a slow-mo dive and hope something dies that isn't you. Things only get worse in tight quarters; there's nothing like being stuck next to a slab of beef

while getting shot when you can't see yourself or your attacker. There are enough health and armor pick-ups to keep it from getting frustrating, and you can also send in your dog, Shadow, for a quick, clean kill when you don't wanna worry about wasting ammo, but the action would have been a lot more fun if clichéd protagonist Jack Slate were more maneuverable. On the plus side, the quick disarm kills are well-animated and brutally satisfying, although you'll get pulverized if you try it when there's more than one enemy around, and the game does look rather impressive. Better luck next time, Jack. **Chris Hoffman**





A word on Gizmondo

First off, the Gizmondo is cool... and not just a little cool; it's very cool. The design and functionality place it among the finest mobile appliances. The interface is streamlined, the screen ultra-crisp and the functionality unique in that, aside from the usual features, which it performs extremely well (movies, music, messaging, camera and imaging, Bluetooth, all the

necessary applications and web service), it's a powerful GPS device which the company intends to make full use of. The launch games lack a killer app, but the power is there, and the accessories, from the double-life battery to the best portable headphones on the market to the hard case, scream design integrity. Now give us Milo and the Rainbow Nasties and Johnny Whatever stat!

Fathammer Classics

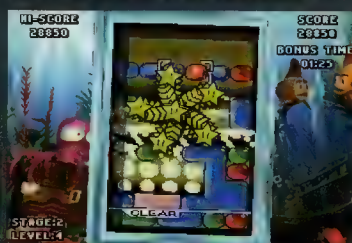
Gizmondo

Score

Developer: Fathammer **Publisher:** Gizmondo Games **Multiplayer:** 2p versus (Stuntcar Extreme only) **Available:** August

While we sit back and wait for the first killer app to drop (Johnny Whatever), Fathammer classics is as good a time passer as any (but little else) rigged with Angelfish, a throwback overhead shooter that's like flying over motionless concept art with the odd spell of parallax (needs more); Super Drop Mania, a nicely polished puzzle dropper in the vein of every other color-matching

puzzle dropper (this is a very good one by any standard, just not my cup of tea); and Stuntcar Extreme, a sluggish but fun 3D stunt racer that becomes more steadily rewarding as you assail rank... provided you have the patience to stick with it. Like most of the Giz launch gaggle, these don't stack up to the competition, but as diversions while we wait for the good stuff they serve their purpose. **Dave Halverson**



Sticky Balls

Gizmondo

Score

Developer: Gizmondo Studios Manchester **Publisher:** Gizmondo Games **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** August

If you thought Chef's Chocolate Salty Balls were tasty, wait until you get a load of Gizmondo's Sticky Balls. More fun with balls simply cannot be had. The gist is to stick as many like colored balls together via springy cue in as few hits as possible, which, as the tables get bigger and more complexly configured and more different colored balls drop, becomes, in a word,

obsessive. I do not get hooked on these games... but I couldn't get enough of these sticky balls. The ball experts at Gizmondo Studios have heaped on a whole buncha elements to make each passing round steadily more sublime, like snakes, fous, rebounds and pickups, and the backgrounds are done up in a Euro-Miyamoto style that just makes me smile. **Dave Halverson**



Fathammer's Gizmondo Motocross 2005

Gizmondo

Score

Developer: Housemarque **Publisher:** Gizmondo Games **Multiplayer:** 2p versus **Available:** August

I wanted so badly to like this game, but it's just too confusing. Fathammer's Gizmondo Motocross 2005 seems to have everything going for it—good sound effects and music, crisp overhead graphics, excellent animation, wireless multiplayer and loads of depth—but the darn tracks are just so hard to decipher; jumps look like turns

and slight gradations in the courses are extremely hard to make out. Only through persistence can you win races, and I'm just not that patient. This particular style of game is a European tradition; strange the testing phase didn't render a perspective overhaul. **Dave Halverson**



Trailblazer

Gizmondo

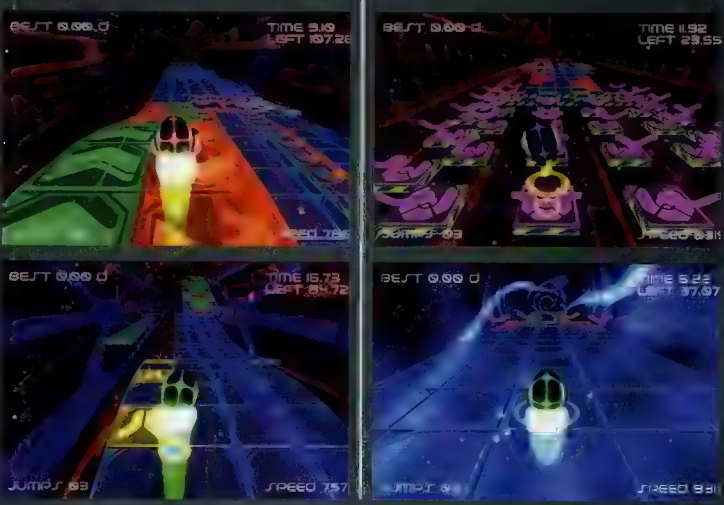
Score

Developer: Gizmondo Studios Manchester **Publisher:** Gizmondo Games **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** August

Trailblazer is to the Giz what Tempest 2000 was to the Jaguar: a fast-paced, ultra-techno twitch delight.

The goal is a simple one: to guide your Trailblazer (Gizmondo for fat wheel) down an ever-perilous collection of colorful transparent grids dotted with progressively perilous obstacles, using a set number of jumps while avoiding bad pads and hitting the ones that will help rather than hinder

your progress... all to a pulsating electronic dance barrage like Thomas Dolby on fast forward. The game's designers at Giz Games certainly seem to know the kind as each collection of grids is appropriately trippy, and the mix of jumping and picking with the game's flow is comparably magnetic to the king of the kind, Tempest 2000. **Dave Halverson**



Feature

TimeShift

Time flies when you're having fun

In a landscape of first-person shooters dominated by franchise players and licensed tech, it has become increasingly risky to introduce an all-new property. Atari is taking the plunge this fall with Saber Interactive's high-concept FPS, TimeShift. Following the expiration of Atari's contract with Epic on the Unreal series, the publisher had a major void to fill in its line-up, and Atari is positioning TimeShift as their next FPS mainstay. No pressure, Saber. After witnessing several absurdly cool gameplay scenarios, such as freezing time to leap across shattered fragments of a collapsing bridge, we

decided to go straight to the source for an extensive look into TimeShift's development with Saber Interactive CEO Matthew Karch—also moonlighting as the game's lead designer. **Mike Griffin**

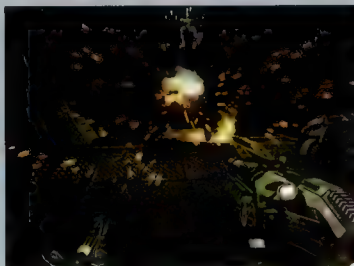
TimeShift

PC, Xbox

Point of Interest

An Xbox version is also on tap, looking remarkably good next to its PC counterpart.

Developer: Saber Interactive Publisher: Atari
Online: Deathmatch, Time Combat Available: October



"...Atari is positioning TimeShift as their next FPS mainstay."

One of the command centers of main bad guy Ivan Krone: interior décor for the discerning megalomaniac.

Interview

Matthew Karch, CEO/lead designer, Saber Interactive



play: When did Saber kick-off TimeShift's development, and how early did you know you wanted to focus on the time manipulation?

Matthew Karch: We started to work on TimeShift in the summer of 2003 as we were wrapping up Will Rock—our first title as a team. We had some good experience under our belts and we were ready to do something that was much larger in scope. All of us wanted to stay within the first-person genre but we didn't want to make a straight shooter. We wanted to do

something that really set our game apart from the other shooters that were in the pipeline. This was compounded by the fact that those other shooters included well-established brands with strong followings. We thought about all the different types of ways to differentiate our game and ultimately came up with time-shifting. The more we thought about the mechanic, the more we realized we had stumbled upon something that was truly unique. While other games have toyed with concepts of time, our implementation of the mechanic

and the ways in which it is employed are really unique and provide a new type of gameplay experience.

What sort of tech can PC gamers— weaned on stuff like Far Cry, Doom 3 and Half-Life 2—expect from Saber's new engine in TimeShift?

Saber's engine, performance-wise, is competitive with the leading first-person engines. Our tech is perfectly capable of powering any of the leading current or next-generation games that make visuals a priority. Our engine supports a wide range of next-generation features from HDR to parallax mapping to per-pixel distortion effects. We view our tech as a facilitator to making great games. While TimeShift will be visually stunning, we don't look at this as the game's primary selling point. Visuals will only take you so far. You don't need a computer or Xbox to see a pretty picture. It is the gameplay that really reigns.

What era forms the basis for the game's campaign mode, and what's the general state of this world?

TimeShift takes place in a funky-up universe that is our take on what the world would look like were changes made to the past. We tried to imagine how things would have changed if some event caused history to take a different course. Because this history-altering event takes place in the Victorian era, we have used Victorian influences as the basis for our art style. Therefore, the game world looks like a cross between the 19th century and futuristic sci-fi. While some would classify our art style as steampunk, I would say that it has some steampunk influences but that it has strayed far enough from this classification to really fall into its own category.

Have any particular real-life references—current or historical—inspired the story?

The primary influences for the story are grounded in science fiction, not reality. Time travel always seems to capture the imagination of fans of science fiction, and we felt that we could create a compelling game world that explored these concepts of time travel. Our influences range from Wells and Heinlein to Doc Brown and Marty McFly. Our writers, Travis Oates and Michael Hall, have written a very compelling script that really explores the idea of an alternate world.

Who is the main character, and why was he chosen to wear the time suit on this mission?

Our hero, Albert Swift, is a retired military

"While TimeShift will be visually stunning, we don't look at this as the game's primary selling point. Visuals will only take you so far."

Matthew Karch, CEO/lead designer
Saber Interactive

guy who has been chosen for very specific reasons to test the Quantum Suit—a device that enables him to manipulate the flow of time. He initially declines the offer, but tragic circumstances force him to reconsider. I don't want to give up too much of the story, but suffice it to say that the people that did this to him messed with the wrong guy. The player gets to take control of our hero and battle through a strange world to right the wrongs that have been done. Our hero is someone that most people can identify with. He's not a superhero. He is an ordinary guy driven by this sense of injustice and by the anger of being betrayed and manipulated.

We've experienced a little FPS time-manipulation this year in the Doom 3 expansion. You can use the Hell artifact to decelerate the game world while the player moves at full speed. What are you doing with TimeShift's time effects that may differ from current stuff?

Our whole universe, from environments to environmental challenges to weapons and opponent AI has been designed with the time manipulation feature in mind. TimeShift allows the player to slow, freeze and reverse the flow of time while the player continues to move around in real-time. Many games have used slow motion to create cool-looking Woo-style visuals and to give the player a competitive advantage for battle. TimeShift is the first to



allow the player to utilize slow, stop and reverse for countless gameplay scenarios. Timeshifting is not a gimmick or an add-on—it is an essential element that is integrated into the fabric of the game.

What kind of AI routines have you given your enemies so they can react to all this timeshifting?

Our goal, first and foremost, was to create compelling AI for standard FPS gameplay. So opponents act logically; they seek cover, coordinate attacks, deftly avoid obstacles, respond to objects controlled by our physics engine and go for the kill when the player is at a disadvantage. Once we established this core system, we tackled the issue of time manipulation. This was actually relatively easy because the behavior that was generated by the player's control of time flowed naturally from our AI system. Imagine, let's say, a situation where the player comes around a corner and alerts the enemy to his presence. The enemy goes on the attack and tries to kill the player. What would happen if at the moment that the player hit that corner he stopped time, peeked at the enemy and then stepped back? Well, logically the opponents are frozen in time and would not have noticed the player. So the recognition and reaction AI will not be triggered and the opponents will have been totally oblivious to the fact that the player was ever there. The stop power can actually be used like this as a stealth device in key areas of the game.

Now imagine the same situation, only this time, the player steps back and reverses time. Now the AI states of the opponents will go from one of awareness to their previous state. You can reverse time to actively alter AI states.

An enemy's world is still moving at regular speed though, right? So if you were spotted, from their point of view your movement would look pretty strange...

Opponents will react naturally to the player's use of time control. If, for example, the player slows or stops time, he will appear to be moving very rapidly or even teleporting from the enemy's perspective. Opponents will react to this with bewilderment or confusion. We have tried to integrate AI that really is tightly integrated with the concept of shifting time, and I think we have pulled it off very nicely.

Will you be easing players into the whole time-manipulation concept? Like, give them more freedom to experiment with it early on?

Yes, our goal is to introduce the player to the challenges of time manipulation gradually. We start the game with training and some relatively easy time challenges that do not require any sort of hoarding of resources. Later on, as the challenges get tougher and more twitch-based, the player really needs to conserve his powers and decide when he should be



Steampunk-style art direction can be seen in TimeShift's weapons, armor and vehicles.



Campaign trail: From the gates to the base

01 SEE-SAW LEAP

You enter this level after a long trike ride. There is seemingly no way around a burning plane wreck. A nearby log resting on a boulder shifts as you walk across it. If you stop time it will freeze, transforming from a see-saw into a ramp to jump over the plane.

02 BATTLE IN THE WOODS

You are now in a grassy clearing. There is a wooded area to your left. A cinematic shows opponents landing in a zeppelin. As you enter the forest, the foliage erupts in gunfire.

03 REBEL ENCOUNTER

Leaving the forest you will encounter friendly rebels. They explain your objective through a cinematic: you must lower barriers on the train tracks to allow them to roll explosives into the enemy gates. The controls are in a tower.

04 MINEFIELD NAVIGATION

You will now approach a field littered with frog mines that spring into the air and explode as you activate them. By slowing time, you can dash through the field and avoid the blast radius of each mine.

05 TRENCH WARFARE

You cross through a pond and up a hillside. Trench guards spot you and a full-scale battle ensues. Use your slow-time powers to gain an advantage over the enemy and proceed to the top of the hill.

06 BIG BAD GUN

At the top of the trenches is a large turret manned by the enemy. One shot from the turret will kill you. By slowing time, you slow down the turret's rotation so that it cannot get a good shot on you. Pull out your guided rocket and bring a missile down on the turret's controller.

07 ENTER THE TURRET

As you reach the turret area, opponents from across the tracks appear in large numbers. Jump in the turret and ventilate them before crossing the tracks to get to the tower.

08 THE TOWER

Arriving at the tower, you take the elevator to the top floor. There is the lever to lower the track barriers. A cinematic will show the train beginning to roll.

09 THE REVERSAL

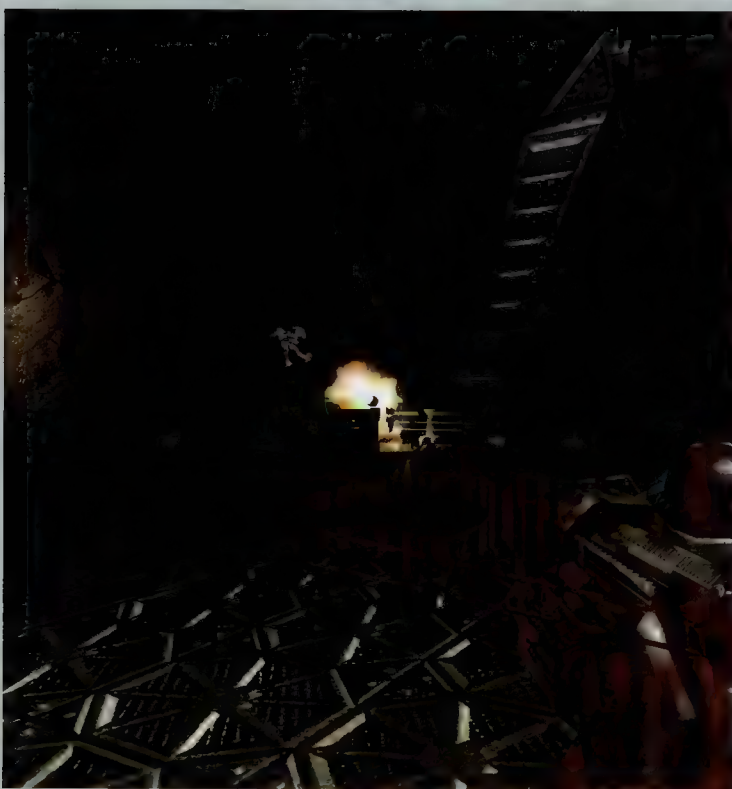
A heavy guard from the far tower will aim a guided rocket at the train car. You have a few seconds to react. If you fail, the car will be destroyed and your chances of entering the base greatly diminished. You have one last shot, however: reverse time to rewind the destruction of the car and kill the guard in the tower before he can fire again. If you succeed, the car blasts a hole through the gates.

10 BASE INVASION

Now you can enter the base and make your way deeper into enemy territory. Resistance will be steep from the get-go, but your enemies don't have timeshifting powers at their disposal... yet.



Slip past Krone Industries' guards by night, using the power of the Quantum Suit to control time.



"The swarm grenades and our version of sticky grenades work well with time control, because the player can stop time to avoid them or reverse time to remove grenades that have been stuck to him."

Matthew Karch, CEO/lead designer, Saber Interactive

using them.

Does time travel and manipulation play into the pacing of events throughout the entire campaign?

The idea of time travel is important for the purposes of establishing the story and the setting of the game and to immerse the player in this strange world. Time travel is an essential element from this vantage point. The timeshifting mechanic with slow, stop and reverse of time is much more important from a gameplay perspective and is absolutely essential to the completion of the game.

OK, let's put aside the time mechanics for a sec and talk weapons. What sort of guns and explosives will you be providing to players?

TimeShift's arsenal is really impressive. Both the player and the enemy have access to the same weapons in the game. We have given the player a wide range of weapons with different types of functionality. Our fantasy-based world has really allowed us to get creative with weapons that are really unique in design and function. We have included some familiar traditional weapons such as shotguns, pistols and assault rifles—albeit in our own unique style—and we have also given the player some over-the-top stuff like plasma cannons, rocket launchers guided by a camera, grenades that swarm opponents, guns that fire off streams of electricity and weapons that allow the player to light opponents on fire from long range. We have really tried to create certain weapons that interact with

the time feature. The swarm grenades and our version of sticky grenades work well with time control, because the player can stop time to avoid them or reverse time to remove grenades that have been stuck to him. Players can also slow or stop time to avoid guided rockets that are chasing him.

How will TimeShift's story be presented in game, and how long of a campaign should players expect?

TimeShift's story will be presented with a combination of FMVs, in-game cinematics and voice-overs. We have tightly integrated the story into the game to make it essentially seamless. My guess is that the average player will get through the game in 15 to 20 hours. During this time he will encounter a wide variety of unique environments and very little repetition.

Presuming it would be difficult to include all elements of time-manipulation in a multiplayer environment, considering online latency, how much time-based gameplay are you attempting to preserve in multiplayer?

We have actually implemented a very cool and unique time control mechanic in multiplayer that incorporates both time-slow and time-stop. We are creating special maps that work very well with this mechanic. I can't reveal too much about it now, but we have solved the majority of the technical problems associated with time control in a multiplayer setting and the results are really very encouraging. Stay tuned for more! **play**





Imperator

Plasma guns and gladiators

It is the future, and humanity has been led into a prosperous space age by the Roman republic. The historical crux point that would have instigated the downfall of the Romans was narrowly avoided, and the empire went on to develop at a staggering rate. With no dark ages, mankind would achieve its first planetary orbit some 400 years earlier than our own world history. The Romans quickly evolved and adapted into a noble inter-stellar civilization. Another of Earth's most powerful nations, the savagely intelligent Mayans, experienced a similar coil in history's plans—and they too avoided disintegration. Despite the early Mayan's crude paganism and witchcraft, they shared the Romans' knack for advancement, and the sophistication and scope of their society soon drove them to the borders of the Roman Empire—terrestrial and spatial—where the era of Imperator's conflict begins.

In Mythic's Imperator, you start off as a cadet in the Roman Academy, an elite training facility for the brightest minds and strongest bodies in the empire. From a very young age, your exceptional intelligence and physical attributes were obvious. The Academy molds you into one of Rome's leading defenders—a close-combat, ranged-combat, field-support or scientific specialist—to fend off the Mayan threat. Mythic's VP of development, Matt Firor, provides additional details. **Mike Griffin**

Imperator

Point of Interest

Mythic intends to have a character level cap of 100 and plenty of challenging high-level content.

Dev: Mythic Entertainment Pub: Mythic Entertainment
Online: Massively multiplayer Available: 2006



Interview

Matt Firor, VP of development, Mythic Entertainment

play: Why did you decide to use existing Earth history and legend as a basis for Imperator's futuristic factions and storyline?

Matt Firor: We have a track record at Mythic of creating games based on public domain licenses—like we did with Dark Age of Camelot by using Arthurian legends. With Imperator, our CEO, Mark Jacobs, came up with a totally different timeline for Earth's history. This gives the game grounding in something that players are familiar with—the Roman history—and

also gives us the benefit of being able to do a hardcore science-fiction game, because it is set in the future.

What will Imperator offer the new player to make them feel welcome and unique from the moment they enter the game world?

We've come up with a game mechanic that makes the player feel like they are important from the moment they enter the game. First, player characters are all members of an elite strata of Roman

society called the "Viritori." Viritori are more capable than most normal Roman citizens, and are the political leaders, warriors, scientists and doctors that lead the Roman civilization against their Mayan enemies. By the mere fact that the players is a member of the Viritori, they are treated as such by NPCs, and are given access to weapons, armor and training that no mere citizen would be allowed.

What engine is Imperator using, and have you made any necessary tweaks based on the requirements of this game?

Imperator's graphics engine is the next generation of the engine used in Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs. It is based on the latest version of Gamebryo, from NDL,

and, of course, has a lot of our own code as well. We don't see the need to reinvent the wheel for every project, so we re-use code as much as possible.

How do you initiate missions and direct players to and from their objectives?

Imperator's mission system is one of our distinguishing features. Players will be able to bring up the mission window at any point in the game and see a list of the missions in their general geographical area and in their general level range. This means that players can get into the action quickly in Imperator—without having to run around to different NPCs to get quests—so there will be much more time spent actually playing the game.

What kind of different class roles will you be including, and will players be obliged to group-up for most objectives?

Our design goal for *Imperator* is to let players play solo if they wish, and *Imperator* will be a great game for the casual player because of the accessibility of content via the mission window and the fact that there will be many missions that cater to the solo play-style. But there will also be plenty to do for groups; more difficult missions can be attempted with a group, and some *Imperator* content is designed totally around groups and having different party members fulfill different objectives inside of a mission.

How much of *Imperator's* combat is action-based, and how important is the quality of stats and items in combat?

Imperator's combat is more MMO-centric. It is not twitch-based in the same way as a first-person shooter—but there are timers, and if the player keeps up with all their abilities and fires them optimally, they can be far more efficient than players that don't. Combat will rely on weapon and ability skills, as well as player level and, to some extent, the weapon—and its modifications—that the player is using.

What kind of grouping mechanisms will *Imperator* use, and how do you intend



to facilitate the process?

We're working on designing the system right now. We will have all the grouping and player organization systems that are expected in a major MMORPG, as well as some new twists on those systems.

Are you planning to offer regularly updated content to help evolve *Imperator's* story of the Romans versus

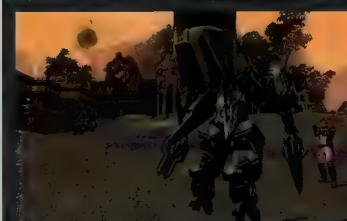
Mayans?

We will definitely be doing story changes during the lifetime of *Imperator*. We haven't decided yet how those story elements will be introduced to the player; probably, they will take place in new content that is introduced to the game rather than one-time events. **play**

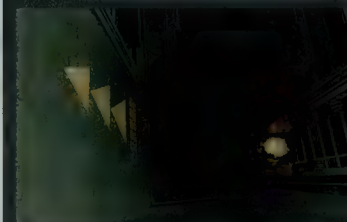
"We're not doing with a game mechanic that makes the player feel like they are important from the moment they enter the game."

Matt Firor, VP of development, Mythic Entertainment

Mission into Mayan territory: Rescue the technician



A combat technician has failed to report in from the field, and you are dispatched to search for him. As you make your way to the area the technician was assigned to, you find that it is thick with Mayan forces. As you are all-too-familiar with Mayan ferocity, you begin to fear the worst.



Once you reach his last known position, you find evidence that he has been taken into a Mayan-controlled bunker. You enter the bunker and prepare to rescue the captured technician and eliminate his Mayan captors.



Almost immediately, you encounter the enemy, but your rigorous training guarantees that a single guard is no match for you.



Resistance becomes heavier as you proceed further into the Mayan stronghold, but you are undeterred, aware that it is up to you alone to save the captured technician.



You locate the technician and are relieved to find him wounded but alive. Grateful to be rescued, he thanks you and you escort him to safety.



***Imperator* will not include player vs. player gameplay in its general campaign, but there will be an elaborate gladiator system in the Coliseum.**

Review

Battlefield 2

Unprecedented communication and advancement

Recommended system specs

OS: Windows XP	Video: Dx9 shader support, 256 MB RAM
Processor: 2.4 GHz CPU	Sound: Audigy 2+
Memory: 1 GB RAM	Internet: Broadband

The squad-based first-person shooter genre was due for a shake-up, and Battlefield 2 will carry that burden...through the jungles of China and across the waters of the Persian Gulf. Prior experience with the Battlefield series is not necessary to immediately jump in and begin securing some territory for your team in this modern combat tour de force.

A bottomless EA budget and huge DICE development staff did not ensure Battlefield 2's success, but it has paid off here—resulting in one of the finest multiplayer shooters to date. The game's dozen levels are exquisitely designed and scaled for 16 to 64 players. There's a clear and steady stream of tactical flow across virtually every map, a rare feat in and of itself, and the balance of these maps—that is, where and how players advance and capture control points—is very well constructed. Battlefield 2's awesome squad communication scheme, a system that supersedes anything we've seen in the genre up to this point, is critical to focusing the game's action. In the system, one player for each side assumes the role of commander, gaining access to a number of strategic tools like satellite camera coverage of the entire battlefield, radar drones that reveal

enemy positions, and long range artillery strikes. The commander privately relays orders—based on the info he is constantly gathering—to squad leaders, and the squad leaders disseminate this data to their teams. It all transpires through private chat channels, written or spoken (instant voice over IP) in the midst of frenetic and satisfying vehicle and infantry-based FPS action. When the teams are filled and the communication system is firing on all cylinders—including intelligent human participation—the impression of squad synergy is probably the best it's ever been in a military shooter.

All this tight squad action takes place across the Middle East and China, from sprawling nuclear facilities to mountainous strongholds and shell-shocked downtown districts. The environments look great: they're gritty, colorful and varied enough, with fine touches of specularity and bump mapping, to be both convincing and alluring. Vehicle and infantry models are fairly impressive, but it's their superb animation that makes the greatest impact in Battlefield 2. Whether it's a foot soldier diving to a prone position mid-sprint or a jet screaming past—just above ground level—and jackknifing vertical with a boost of afterburner, movement is represented



"There's a clear and steady stream of tactical flow across virtually every map, a rare feat in and of itself..."



With all the heavy metal, you'd think the infantry would have it rough, but BF2's foot soldiers pack some heat.

extremely well—without being rigidly realistic. To get the most out of BF2's visuals, you'll need a pretty high-end machine (see recommended specs). The key hardware is a Dx9 video card, like a GeForce 6600 GT and up, with 256 megs on board. In terms of sound design, Battlefield 2 is solid overall, though a few weapons could benefit from a little more low-frequency punch.

This is top-tier military FPS material, and Battlefield 2 secures its modern classic status with the inclusion of BFHQ. Your frag counts now have meaning: Battlefield 2 tracks and saves *all* your stats to the persistent BFHQ server. The more

points you get, the greater your visible rank. Raise your rank and you'll unlock new weapons to use in combat, so you can create the ultimate squad with friends *and* build up your personal BF2 profile online while gaining status and capability. There are minor quibbles to temper all this BF2 praise: certain airfields are too easy to "jet camp" by bombing enemy planes as soon as they spawn, loading times are lengthy, and the server browser interface is rather bland and minimal. These elements may improve over time, as this outstanding shooter is destined to have a long life filled with upgrades, mods and expansions. **Mike Griffin**



Battlefield 2
9.0
Score

PC

Fantastic team play with superb flow in movement and combat. Vehicles are fun to drive.

Server interface is lacking and load times are excessive. Some maps have a few questionable camping opportunities.

Developer: Digital Illusions CE Publisher: EA Games

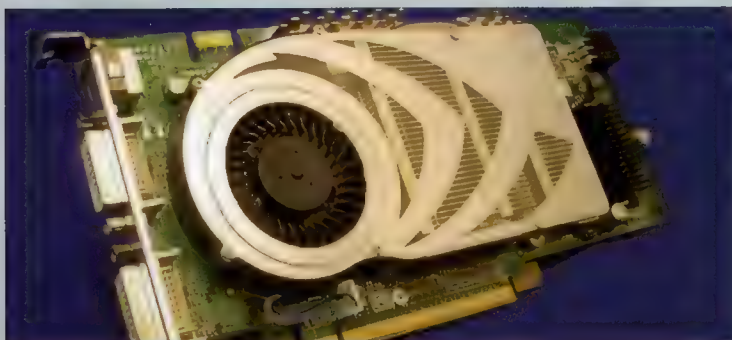
Online: 16-, 32-, 64-player Conquest Available: June

Postscript

Nvidia Launches Next-Gen GPU

It's one thing to have a next-gen graphics card introduction well ahead of the competition, but to actually have merchandise in retailers' hands across two continents on the same day, with no early sales leaks and no NDA-breaking press slips...well, suffice to say, Nvidia's GeForce 7800 GTX launch was well orchestrated. Introduced with new real-time promo-characters Luna (seen at the PS3 launch) and Mad Mod Mike, Nvidia's successor to the GeForce 6800 series of cards adds eight additional pixel shader pipelines—for a total of 24—on a complex 302 million transistor chip. Although they

share a similar architecture and identical transistor count, the GeForce 7800 GTX and RSX aren't as close as many had anticipated. The PS3's GPU still enjoys a healthy clock speed advantage over the 7800, and it may contain more shader pipelines, although it has less local memory bandwidth. In any case, the GeForce 7800 GTX is a beast of a graphics card, running Doom 3 in 2048 x 1536 resolution at close to 70 fps and frequently besting the benchmark scores of twin GF 6800s running in SLI. If you have \$599.99 to spend on it (ouch), you're in for some heavenly gaming.



Risk Your Life for \$1 million

Planetwide Games has launched the latest fantasy-themed massively multiplayer online RPG, RYL: Path of the Emperor, and they're dangling a rather large one-million dollar carrot in front of players. Over the next 10 months or so, players will be able to participate in an ongoing PvP tournament that will culminate with the grand finale, broadcast live at E3 2006, for a \$1 million purse. It's certainly a captivating marketing angle that will probably sell quite a few retail boxes, and it's the kind of move one might expect of a company with the visionary founders of Gamespy and Chuck E. Cheese on its board of directors. RYL is introducing another industry first to its subscription plan: instead of the usual monthly fee, players can "buy" their subscription by participating in a series of online surveys with corporate researcher GMI. With frequent survey use, it's even possible to go beyond the subscription fee and earn a modicum of bonus credit.

With all of these business hooks, Planetwide Games appears to have their marketing and promotional plans on track, but what does RYL: Path of the Emperor offer to players? Co-developed by Taiwan's Youxiland and South Korea's

Gamasoft, RYL is primarily a player-versus-player online RPG with action-based combat. Many of the questing and item-crafting play mechanics involve strengthening your role for PvP and guild vs. guild combat, although hundreds of additional missions exist for players that may want to focus less time on PvP. The final version of RYL was released just days before we closed this issue, so it's too early to pass final judgment. Initial impressions reveal some dubious player character animation and a slightly clumsy in-game interface, but the twitch combat is refreshing. The world is already heavily populated with players, and item auctions and party formation calls were rolling across chat channels non-stop.



Warner hands off Matrix Online to Sony; bonus included



Early morning rumors sent MxO players scrambling to the game's message boards as a flurry of concerned posts erupted. The burning question: "Is SoE taking over The Matrix Online?" Many players knew that some kind of major change was in the cards for MxO. After a rumored \$20 million spent on the game's development and with retail sales hovering around 50,000 units months after its release, the entire operation was simply hemorrhaging cash for Warner Bros. Interactive, whose first foray into massively multiplayer online gaming was a sobering experience. Warner and SoE hit the news wire with official statements acknowledging that MxO's rights were indeed sold off to Sony Online Entertainment.

Now, we support the game and continue to recommend it to anyone seeking a solid urban-themed MMO, but the reality is that something would



have to sweeten the deal for anyone to pick up MxO in its current condition. For SoE, the candy coating came in the form of exclusive rights to develop a new MMO based on the Warner-owned DC Comics property. Obviously SoE would love to draw comic-loving players from the highly regarded City of Heroes, but in the big picture we see a DC film revival taking place, with Batman Begins out now, Superman Returns arriving in 2006 and Wonder Woman to follow in 2007. The timing couldn't be better for a DC Comics-based persistent online world.

Where does this leave The Matrix Online subscribers? The entire registration system will be migrated to SoE's "Station Access" service, where players can opt-in to a \$21.99 monthly package that includes subscriptions to MxO and virtually every major online SoE game available. As far as the live events schedule, a feature that MxO players are pleading to have preserved, this is something that SoE has yet to fully commit to. It's worth noting that no massively multiplayer SoE title has ever offered game-wide live events of MxO's caliber.

NPD PC Game Sales

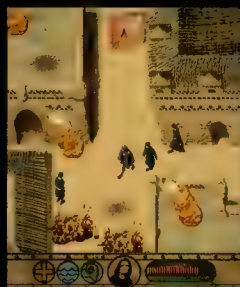
01. World of Warcraft - VU Games
02. Guild Wars - NCsoft
03. GTA: San Andreas - Rockstar Games (Take 2)
04. The Sims 2 - Electronic Arts
05. The Sims 2 University Expansion Pack - Electronic Arts
06. The Sims Deluxe - Electronic Arts
07. Star Wars Galaxies: The Total Experience - LucasArts
08. Lego Star Wars - Eidos
09. The Sims: Unleashed Expansion Pack - Electronic Arts
10. Half-Life 2 - VU Games

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Top Mobile Picks

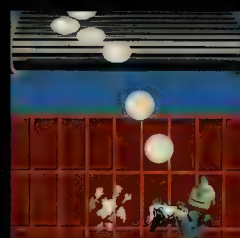
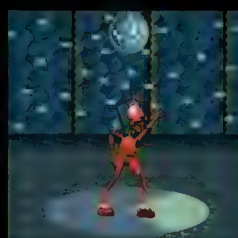
Go to java.com/play for prices and compatibility



Kingdom of Heaven

In Kingdom Of Heaven, it's Jerusalem, 1168 A.D. The city is under terrible siege by the Saracen army. You are Balian, true knight, Jerusalem's defender. Princess Sibylla and her citizens are counting on your valor and courage to lead them to safety. Guide them through the overwhelming enemy forces and prove yourself as a heroic knight!

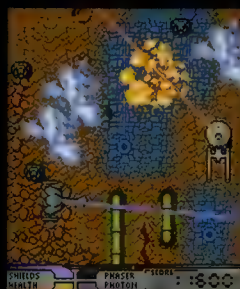
Publisher: Sorrent, Inc.



Robots: the movie

Relive the kinetic fun of Robots. Rodney's hard at work to show his idol, Bigweld, his latest invention. Scope the landscape of Robot City. Zoom into three mini-games that help Rodney achieve his dreams.

Publisher: Sorrent, Inc.



Star Trek: The Birds of Prey

Star Trek: Birds of Prey lets you command the USS Enterprise in a dramatic storyline! While the ship is answering a distress call from the planet Psi 20, Dr. McCoy is kidnapped. Help Captain Kirk and the Enterprise crew locate and save their missing friend. Five levels of unique arcade-style action present a variety of exciting challenges. Navigate through treacherous worm-holes and asteroid fields, avoid solar flares and fight the ships of the Romulan and Klingon star fleets!

Publisher: Jumbuck Entertainment

Texas Hold'em King 2

The best mobile poker game around is back! Texas Hold'em King 2 now lets you play live. Build up your bankroll and gain respect in ring games, or win prizes in real tournaments. Post high scores and talk trash to other card sharks real-time or in forums. Quit your job, and become the world's top poker player!

Publisher: Magmic Games

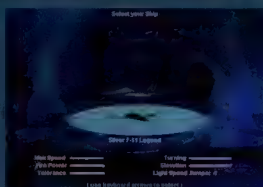


Desktop Adventures

Radical Aces

Are you the radical ace that can save humanity? Then climb on board this desktop action 3D aircraft fighting game! In Radical Aces, you are the last pilot located at the Mars Space Station, and you must protect the station from the alien attackers or the solar system will be doomed.

Publisher: RadicalPlay.com



Sky & Telescope's Interactive Sky Chart

Whether you're in Greenland, Australia or a small town in the USA, simply plug your city into Sky & Telescope's Interactive Sky Chart and simulate a naked-eye view of the sky. Works from any location on earth, at any time of day or night, on any date from 1600 to 2400. A display of Sun, Moon and planet labels, bright star labels, constellations and deep sky objects give this sky chart its reputation for being the best. You can even print an all-sky map!

Publisher: Sky & Telescope

Tech Center

FluxTime Studio



Create your own animated clips with FluxTime Studio! It's fun and as easy to use as a tape recorder! Mail your clips to friends and family as eCards or publish them in FluxTime Studio's online gallery and share your art with the world. Take the director's seat and try out FluxTime Studio's free standard service now!

Publisher: FluxTime Limited

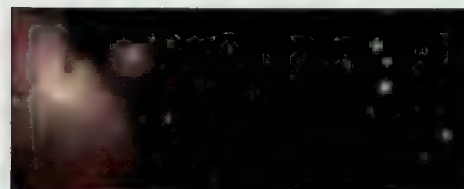
Killer Desktop App

Slooh



For the first time ever, Slooh, the Online Space Show, lets you experience unlimited live missions to the best and brightest sights of outer space. Over the course of a five- or 10-minute mission, Slooh's telescopes will produce breathtaking imagery right before your eyes. Zoom and pan the telescopes and listen to storytellers dazzle you with the scale and beauty of the universe. Ready to take command of the telescope on your own? Schedule a solo mission and explore the skies!

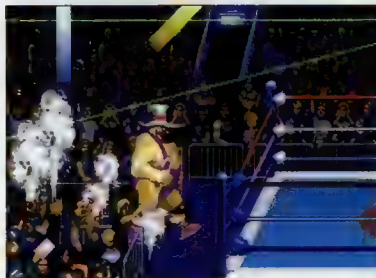
Publisher: Slooh.com



Sell by date: infinity

PREVIEW

The inclusion of Mike Haggar was one of the coolest aspects of Slam Masters. He had almost all his Final Fight moves, like his spinning clothesline.



Saturday Night Slam Masters

It's breakin' down on Saturday night!

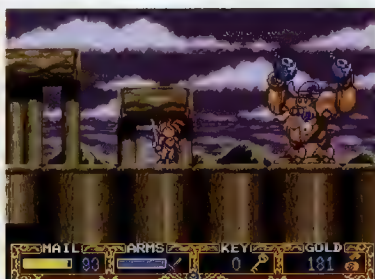
System: Super NES, Genesis Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Released: 1994

Saturday Night Slam Masters is the wrestling game for the non-wrestling fan. It wasn't about crazy backstage plots, 24-inch pythons or cocked eyebrows; it was about flashy, grapple-heavy, pick-up-and-play fighting action in a pro wrestling guise. What Slam Masters lacked in depth and technique, compared to Capcom's other efforts of the era, it compensated for with multiplayer action and a great cast of characters. From lucha libre wrestlers like El Stingray to Jumbo "Flap" Jack, the gargantuan pimp wannabe, Slam Masters had a cast to rival any fighting game out there, and they came complete with Street Fighter-style special moves. One of Slam Masters' most endearing traits, in fact, was its connection to the Street Fighter universe. When Biff Slamkovich lost, he'd reference Zangief by name, and the inclusion of Final Fight's own Mike Haggar made the game a must for any Capcom devotee. Better than that, however, was the game's two-on-two Team Battle

Royale mode, which was unlike anything else in fighting games at the time, and was one of the best reasons to own a four-player adaptor. Sadly, the sequel, Ring of Destruction, never got a home port or any noteworthy distribution in North America (it was also more of a traditional one-on-one fighting game), but maybe Capcom will see fit to include it in their next classics compilation. Chris Hoffman

"...flashy, grapple-heavy, pick-up-and-play fighting action in a pro wrestling guise."

Just look at that burning-hot 2D. You know you want it!



Popful Mail

Nuts Cracker's gonna get it!

System: Sega CD Developer: Sega/Falcom Publisher: Working Designs Released: 1995

Popful Mail is a super-fun and oft times funny action-RPG that stands as one of the few real treasures for the U.S. Sega CD, localized back when Working Designs was working its magic on all things anime- or manga-inspired from Japan. The game gave us CD quality sound—a huge milestone in the 16-bit era—two and a half hours of spoken dialogue (before we ever thought about skipping it) and 20 minutes of anime cutscenes, all in an awesomely animated 2D package reminiscent of Wonderboy 5 and 6. The lead character, bounty hunter Mail (a Lina Inverse clone if there ever was one) is out for her big score, attempting to bring in the notorious Nuts Cracker (that's Italian!), but, after being foiled by his marionettes, is put on the trail of Muttonhead and soon enlists the aid of two additional playable characters: magician Tatt and Gaw, a pudgy little dragon. Two buttons and a menu and I still cannot put it down. Track it down on Super Famicom for a real treat. Dave Halverson

"...localized back when Working Designs was working its magic on all things anime..."

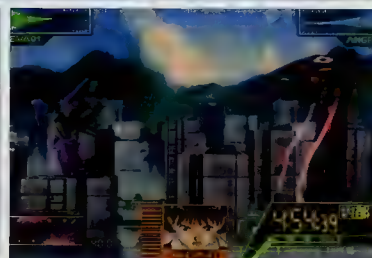
ANIME GAME ROUND-UP

PART ONE

I definitely bit off more than I could chew when I decided to finally put together an anime games report, as what sounded like a snap quickly escalated into rummaging through my storage and covering my office floor with antiquated screen capture equipment. In the end, I was able to squeeze in about 60 percent of what I unearthed, so there are holes, which I reserve to the obvious stuff like Street Fighter, Tekken, Toshinden...stuff you're well aware of (couldn't find my Vampire Hunter D or DC Sakura Wars though, dammit). If any conclusion can be drawn from all this, it's that Bandai has missed a lot of opportunities in the U.S., and that they're as responsible for the genre's success as they are its lack of triple-A games and mostly mediocre titles—a trend they seem to be reversing...

TOP 5 MOST COLLECTIBLE ANIME GAMES

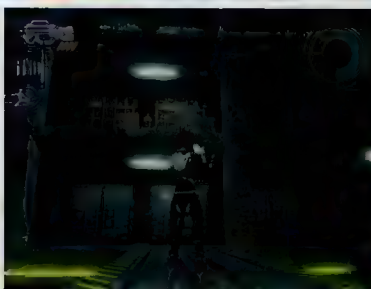
- 01 Neon Genesis Evangelion N64 (JP)
- 02 Fist of the North Star Mega Drive
(Japanese, w/exploding heads)
- 03 Devil Hunter Yohko Mega Drive (Japanese)
- 04 Anubis: Zone of the Enders Special Edition PS2 (Japanese, Konami Dendou Selection)
- 05 Fist of the North Star PS (Japanese)



PLAY TOP 10 ANIME GAMES ALL TIME



- 01 Astro Boy: Omega Factor (Japan only) Treasure/Sega
- 02 Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner (Japan only) RCE Japan/Konami
- 03 Ghost in the Shell Stand Alone Complex (Japan only) Quinpro/Bandai
- 04 Magic Knight Rayearth Sega/Working Designs
- 05 Ghost in the Shell (Japan only) SCEB/THQ
- 06 Chou-jikuu Yousai Macross (Japan only) Sega/AM2
- 07 Gungrave Overdose PlayStation 2 Red/Mastiff
- 08 Initial D Special Stage (Japan only) Sega Rosso
- 09 Lupin the Third: Treasure of the Sorcerer King Bandai
- 10 Neon Genesis Evangelion (Japan only) Bandai



BIGGEST BLUNDER AWARD:

To Bandai, for failing to localize AM2's Chou-jikuu Yousai Macross or their own Evangelion for N64 (and now PS2).





Devil (Momonot) Hunter Yohko

Year/Type: 1991/Action

Developer/Publisher: NCS/Sega Japan

System: Mega Drive (Japan Only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: A side-scrolling action-platformer with a decidedly mystical edge; not the greatest likeness of Yohko, but for its time an altogether beautiful game with a great soundtrack.

How's the anime? A cornucopia of exploding monster goo, naked transformations and decidedly wicked demons, as teenage exorist Yohko Mano goes about her business. The Perfect Collections are must-haves for mature audiences.



Choujin Gakuen (Voltage Fighter) Gowcaizer

Year/type: 1995-'96/Vs. Fighting

Dev/Pub: Urban Plant/SCEJ

System: Neo Geo (U.S./Japan), PS (Japan Only)

Which came first? The game

The gist: Masami Obari's acorn-nipped beauties and pretty boys do battle in this poorly ported PS game (from the Neo Geo) that had one thing going for it: diorama! Before Paper Mario, there was Voltage Fighter Gowcaizer!

How's the anime? The movie is good, the OVA better (due to a few added scenes). Among the best and bounciest of all the fighting anime... too bad that's not saying much.



Jojo's Bizarre Adventure

Year/Type: 1999/Vs. Fighting

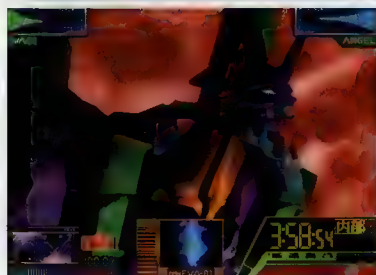
Developer/Publisher: Capcom

System: Dreamcast/PS

Which came first? The game

The gist: The weirdest gaggle of freaks to ever grace a fighting game in all of their creepy glory, including their alter egos called "Stand" and the gaming world's fiercest fighting Chihuahua!

How's the anime? A wild and wacky adult action-adventure with a side order of horror, neo-Mexican flare and lots of interesting contrast between the characters and their Stands. Soul-sucking vampires... beware of dog.



Neon Genesis Evangelion

Year/Type: 1999/Action

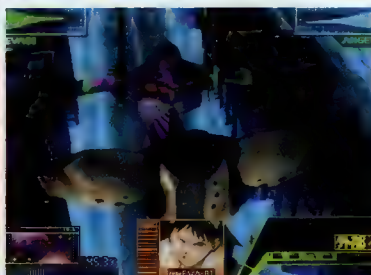
Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: Nintendo 64 (Japan Only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Real-time EVA-01 vs. Angel fighting, 3D action with integrated story, clips from the show and a great soundtrack. Sheer madness that it was never released in the U.S.

How's the anime? Legendary, if not life-altering. See the new ADV Platinum Editions and then go directly to Manga's The End of Evangelion. The answers are out there.



GUNNM Martian Memory (Battle Angel)

Year/Type: 1998/action-RPG

Developer/Publisher: Yukito/Banpresto

System: PS (Japan Only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: The endearing tale of a cyber doll (Gally) discovered in a garbage dump by a cyborg doctor (Ito) who rebuilds and raises her to become the Battle Angel, a lethal bounty hunter. Archaic 3D, but a decent overall game that's hard to get into, but easy to follow once you do.

How's the anime? Good enough to get James Cameron out of the sea long enough to adapt it for the big screen.



Evangelion 2: Shinseiki Evangelions

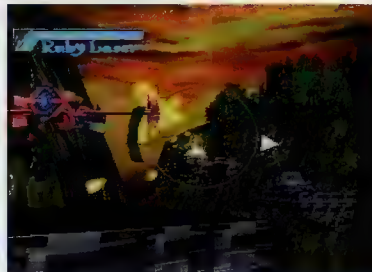
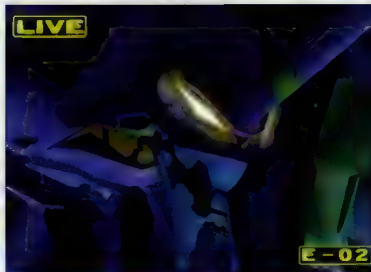
Year/Type: 2003/Action-RPG

Developer/Publisher: Alfa System/Bandai

System: PS2 (Japan Only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Real time exploration (and conversation!) at places like NERV HQ and Misato's flat, combined with real-time 3D fighting tethered to a distinctly Gainax-approved city grid system. Again, a shame it never hit stateside. Apparently Bandai doesn't like cash.



Cowboy Bebop

Year/Type: 1998/3D space shooter

Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PS (Japan Only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Collectors only, please: Bandai does their best low-budget Star Fox and uses Cowboy Bebop as the ruse. Good for a hoat and/or a controller toss (okay, I broke four.)

How's the anime? A stylish, ultra-groovy, Tarantino-esque sci-fi/western. One of the most beloved anime in the whole wide world, and home to Faye Valentine, Bone's gift to mankind.



ANIME GAME ROUND-UP

Panzer Dragoon Zwei, Saga, and Orta

Year/Type: 1996-2004/Shooting-RPG

Developer/Publisher: Team Andromeda, Smilebit/Sega

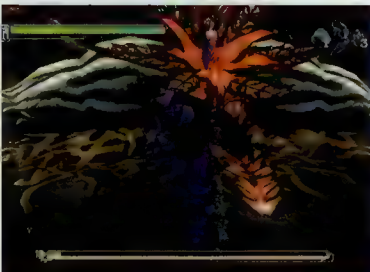
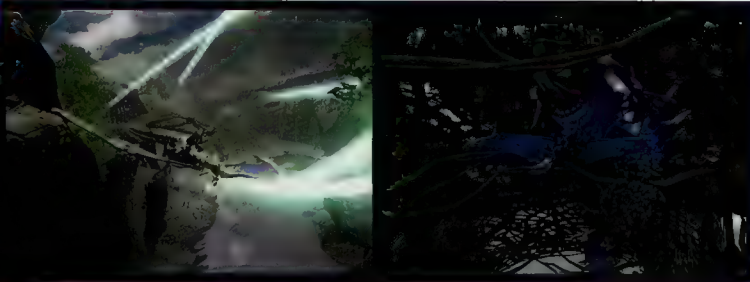
System: Sega Saturn, Xbox

Which came first? The game

The gist: There have been four amazing PDs (with Saga coming closest to the distal anime), placing it among the best shooting series of all time, alongside Star Fox, Thunderforce, R-Type and

Gradius. What Team Andromeda started, Smilebit finished with care. If you haven't already, find all four, and pretend the anime never happened.

How's the anime? The PD OVA blended animation and CG before the two had any business being together, and did it poorly at that. An amazing game franchise humiliated by a shallow, confused, flat 30-minute commercial.



Berserk/Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage

Year/Type: 1999/Action

Developer/Publisher: Yuke's/ASCII (Jpn), Eidos (U.S.)

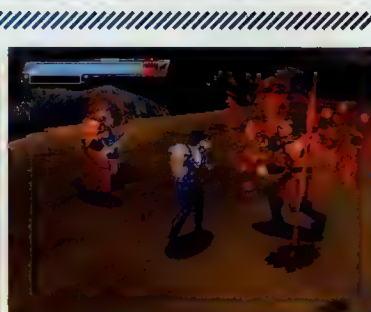
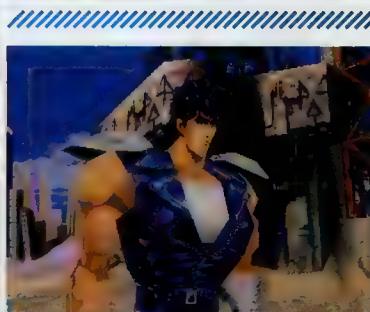
System: Dreamcast

Which came first? The anime

The gist: One of the most impressive early action games for DC that really set it apart in terms of processing power. A big, violent, stylized action game featuring a sword as big as the

character (Guts) who wields it and buckets of blood.

How's the anime? Fantastic. Dramatic, visceral and wholly unforgettable. Told in flashback, Berserk combines the demonic and the dramatic better than it's ever been done.



Fist of the North Star

Year/Type: 2000/Action

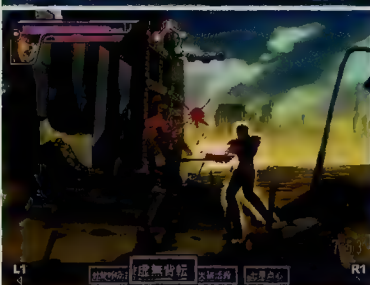
Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PS (Japan only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Kenshiro, master of the Hokuto Shinken fighting technique, wanders the post-apocalyptic landscape...aiding the downtrodden by making human Jiffy-Pop out of all who would stand in his way. Walk, kill, and repeat. Lots of blood and a p-cool hundred-hand whack system for that extra sauce.

How's the anime? At its core, Fist is a basic tale of revenge and redemption that caught fire due to its excessive gore. Otherwise, Kenshiro was a stiff...and the stories, predictable. The recently released New FoNS however, fixes all.



Magic Knight Rayearth

Year/Type: 1995 (Japan), 1998 (U.S.)/Action-RPG

Developer/Publisher: Sega/Sega (Jpn), Working Designs (U.S.)

System: Sega Saturn

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Ultra-detailed top-down action-role-playing at its very finest, localized and fastidiously packaged with by WD. A brilliant, fully voice-acted SD anime adventure that dazzled the SS faithful who waited forever for its arrival. Fourteen-year-old girls with huge heads rock.

How's the anime? Alice in Wonderland-like fantasy with a distinctly Japanese flavor—just edgy enough to stomach the fluff. Clamp always brings the magic.

Last Battle/Sega Ages Fist of the North Star

Year/Type: 1988, 2004 Action

Developer/Publisher: Sega

System: Mega Drive, Genesis, PS2

Which came first? The anime

The gist: The first 2D action game for the Genesis was a bloodless version of the Mega Drive's Fist of the North Star, later updated for PS2 (shown) and currently the best game in the Sega Ages series, which explains why it's not included in the recent Sega Classics Collection. Keep that U.S. Sonic CD music blazing Sega, and please don't make another NIGHTS!



Chou-jikuu Macross

Year/Type: 2003/Action-Shooting

Developer/Publisher: AM2/Sega

System: PS2

Which came first? The anime

The gist: The finest of all the Macross or Robotech games; air and ground assaults with buttery control, awesome models and stellar animation, thanks to the fine gamesmiths at AM2. Fans will especially appreciate the ground-based battles, which (finally) capture the true spirit of the franchise... Another huge oversight by Bandai for not bringing this one over.

How's the anime? Robotech is (of course) a classic, but I prefer the Macross Plus series. Either way, it's all very, very good.



Gungrave Overdose

Year/Type: 2004/Action-Shooting

Developer/Publisher: RED Entertainment/Mastiff

System: PS2

The gist: Brandon Heat was betrayed and murdered, yet he lives (sort of) for no other reason than revenge, which he dispenses with maximum velocity. The meanest, most stylish action-shooter around. Of the two (Sega released Gungrave in '02), Overdose righted all the wrongs, adding two additional playable characters and more (and longer) missions.

How's the anime? A series as dramatic as it is carnage-drenched that never falters. Highly stylized, somber and masterfully brought to life by Madhouse.



Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner

Year/Type: 2003/Action

Developer/Publisher: KCE Japan/Konami

System: PS2

Which came first? The game.

The gist: One of the most beautiful cel-shaded games ever (thanks to Hideo Kojima), packed with ground- and air-based action assaults that take your Orbital Frame, Jehuty, through its paces via probably the best mech gameplay in existence.

How's the anime? The OVA Idolo serves as a prequel to the original game (ZOE), while the series Dolores I more resembles the events of The 2nd Runner, although they are unrelated. Both are p- great, with the OVA (Idolo) being the better of the two.

Lupin the Third: Treasure of the Sorcerer King

Year/Type: 2004/Action-Adventure

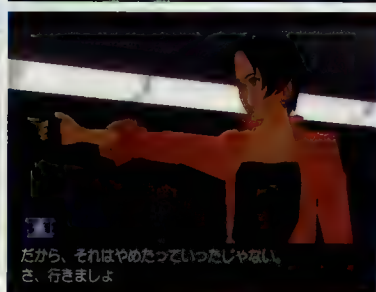
Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PS2

Which came first? The anime

The gist: A Lupin game that lives up to the namesake? Not only that, but Bandai actually released it in the U.S.! Didn't market it (or even send us one), but they released it. And Jigen and Goemon are along to boot. Think Metal Gear Lupin... intrigued?

How's the anime? There's a stack, and they are all (of course) cheeky and über-cool, some more than others. The essentials are Lupin: Castle of Cagliostro (one of the best shows ever, period) along with Secret of the Twilight Gemini and Pursuit of Haimao's Treasure.



RahXephon

Year/Type: 2003/Action-RPG

Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PS2 (Japan only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: A lot like Evangelion 2: real-time exploration and conversation, mixed with real-time mecha versus fighting. A little mundane on the graphics side, but the novel conversation targeting system scores points on the story side... if you can read Japanese.

How's the anime? Tokyo may be the last city on Earth, and a high school student coded to an enormous humanoid weapon is mankind's last hope of saving the planet... perhaps. Nothing is as it seems in the next best thing to Evangelion.



Gunslinger Girl

Year/Type: 2004/Adventure-Shooting

Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PS2 (Japan only)

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Assume the role of a number of would-be orphaned little girls, reprogrammed to become the world's most



Initial D Special Stage

Year/Type: 2003/Action-RPG

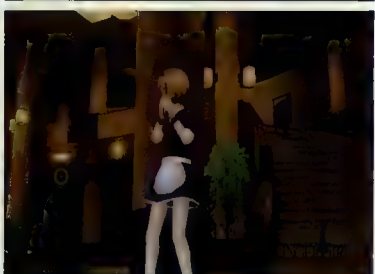
Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PS2 (Japan only)

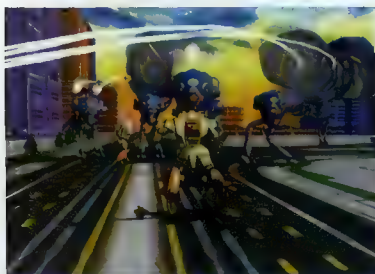
Which came first? The anime

The gist: The next-gen Daytona we never got. A full blown, triple-A Sega racer... with an anime veneer to boot! SS also sports one of the best racing soundtracks since (of course) Daytona! Rolling starts sold separately. Not available in America where Sega hates us.

How's the anime? The Fast and the Furious, Japan style... in other words, actually in possession of substance and entertainment value. Funny, well written, and a gorgeous blend of CG and traditional animation.



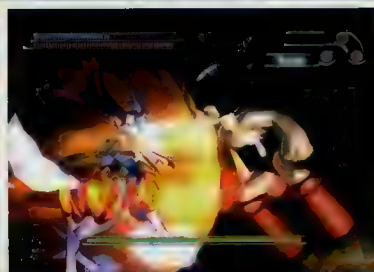
ANIME GAME ROUND-UP

**Robotech: Battlecry and Invasion****Year/Type:** 2002, 2004/Action**Developer/Publisher:** Vicious Cycle/TDK (Battlecry), Global Star (Invasion)**System:** PS2, Xbox**Which came first?** The anime**The gist:** Vicious Cycle takes two kicks at the Robotech can and

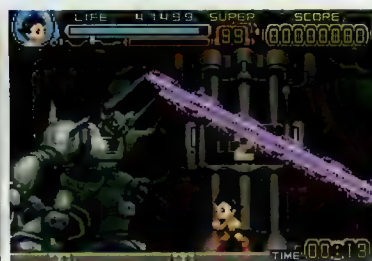
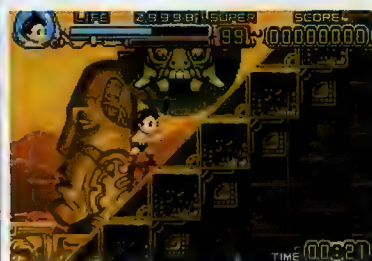
fully respects the lore but doesn't have the right stuff to break the mediocrity barrier... resulting in two above-average (but overall disappointing) Robotech games.

How's the anime? Old! But still great, and currently available in a jam-packed re-issue from ADV Films.**Sorcerous Stabber Orphen aka Orphen: Scion of Sorcery****Year/Type:** 2000/Action-Adventure**Developer/Publisher:** Shade/SCEJ (Jpn), Activision (U.S.)**System:** PS2**Which came first?** The anime**The gist:** While Orphen definitely shows its age, it was a remarkable game for the time. Not so much for its environments,

but for its epic boss battles and unique targeting system.

How's the anime? The initial series starts out strong, fizzles, and then lets out a little puff of smoke at the climax. The follow-up is a little lighter and a little tighter. The characters, however, are what make the magic.**Astro Boy****Year/Type:** 2004/Action-Adventure**Developer/Publisher:** Sonic Team/Sega**System:** PS2**Which came first?** The anime**The gist:** Tezuka's legendary boy robo comes to PS2 from Sonic Team... and p-much sucks. The GameCube is Sonic Team's system of choice, has the perfect installed base, and they go

PS2... Sega! Not a bad game, but a missed opportunity (and a major pay day) for Sega.

How's the anime? Osamu Tezuka's 1963 Tetsuwan Atom (Astro Boy) was Japan's first animated TV series, and pretty much birthed anime. It's old and it looks it; however, the all-new series (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment) is utterly spectacular, just like Treasure's GBA version of the game...**Astro Boy: Omega Factor****Year/Type:** 2004/Action-Adventure**Developer/Publisher:** Treasure/Sega**System:** Game Boy Advance**Which came first?** The anime**The gist:** The world's premiere 2D game designers worked their magic on Tezuka's magnum opus and created one of the best handheld games ever: a side-scrolling tour-de-force that takes the GBA places we never thought it could go. The finest anime game of all time is also one of the best 2D games, period.**Shaman King: Master of Spirits****Year/Type:** 2004/Action**Developer/Publisher:** KCE Studios/Konami**System:** GBA**Which came first?** The anime**The gist:** Bypass all other versions and see MoS or the upcoming MoS 2. Castlevania-like 2D action for anime fans, with colorful characters and their powerful spirits in place of vampire hunters and, er, vampires.**How's the anime?** Look for the FUNimation original (not the neutered WB version) and you'll see why Shonen Jump's Shaman King is one of the most beloved manga/anime series of the last decade.**FullMetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel****Year/Type:** 2004/Action-Adventure**Developer/Publisher:** Racjin/Square Enix**System:** PS2**Which came first?** The anime**The gist:** For such an amazing series, the fact that Broken Angel is merely above average rings like a death knell for series die-hards. FullMetal deserved the red carpet... and instead Square Enix put down paper towels... nice absorbent ones, but paper nonetheless. With any luck, the sequel will fare better, although in my opinion it still doesn't live up to the Square Enix or FullMetal namesake.**How's the anime?** Tragic, bittersweet, funny, magical and full of surprises: It's a phenomenon for good reason.



Ghost in the Shell

Year/Type: 1997/Action-Shooting

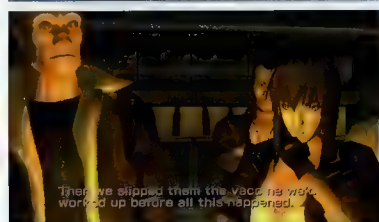
Developer/Publisher: Exact/Sony (Jpn), THQ (U.S.)

System: PS

Which came first? The anime

The gist: The first Ghost in the Shell game featured the best animated intro seen to date, along with the most innovative third-person shooting of its time... gameplay that has stood the test of time (and then some). One of the best PS games ever, and Motoko never even leaves her Tachikoma.

How's the anime? One of the most celebrated anime movies and series ever, Shirow Masamune set the standard for a generation of films and anime to come.



Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex PSP

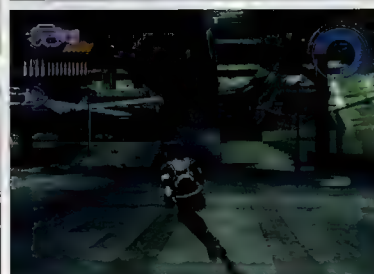
Year/Type: 2004/Action-Adventure

Developer/Publisher: Bandai

System: PSP

Which came first? The anime

The gist: Not just another pretty FPS; Ghost on PSP features 51 different weapons and is designed to take full advantage of the PSP's wireless capabilities (via head-to-head) and allow players to customize and command Tachikomas in the single-player game, as well as look into the complex systems and other Stand Alone Complex games. With gameplay designed around Kusanagi's agility, Batou's strength, Torosaka's stealth and Saito's sniper skills, the PSP Ghost in the Shell is among the year's most anticipated PSP games.



Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex

Year/Type: 2004/Action-Adventure

Developer/Publisher: Bandai/SCEI (Japan), Bandai (U.S.)

System: PS2

Which came first? The anime

The gist: This time we get to play as "Major" Motoko Kusanagi and Batou (and Tachikoma!). Although the controls are unconventional, once mastered, SAC builds into a sci-fi tour-de-force that fans will especially appreciate making it one of the most underrated PS2 games, housed within the worst box art in recent memory... why they opted for a chunky render when Shirow's got tonnes of gorgeous art at the ready is forever a mystery and certainly hurt the title.

ANIME COMBAT

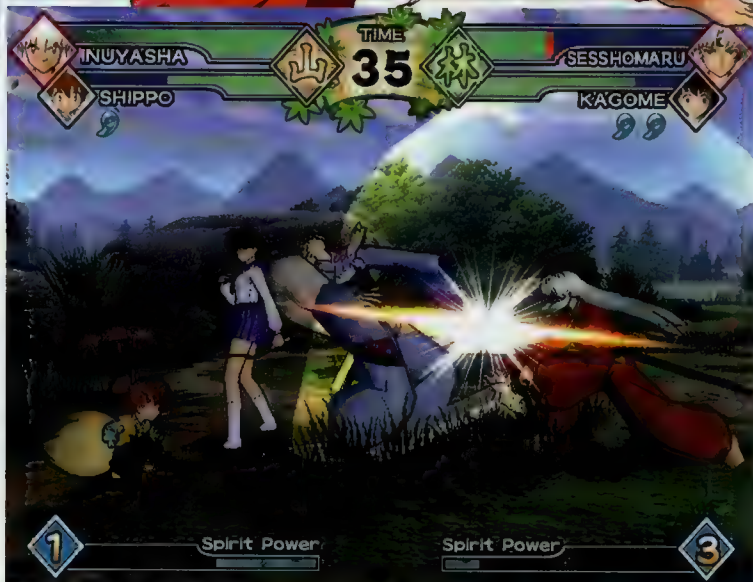


Shonen Jump's One Piece Grand Battle

Year/Type: Sept. 2005/Fighting
Developer/Publisher: Ganbarian/Bandai
System: PS2, GC

Which came first? The anime

Preview: A great show, and now an exceptional fighting game in the vein of Powerstone, *One Piece*, like Shonen Jump's other Saturday morning juggernaut, *Shaman King*, features a cast only an anime fan (or similarly warped individual) could love, and now they're all available in *Grand Battle* where they can chat it up and then lay the smack down. The gameplay here definitely weighs in on the hyper side, with item drops, chests to pop open and use what's inside, brightly colored locales and over-the-top scenarios... but what's more significant is that this is probably the best fighting game Bandai has ever published, signaling (hopefully) a more serious approach to anime games in the future. On the heels of the solid stealth of *Lupin*, and near triple-A status of *Stand Alone Complex*, this bodes well for the future.



InuYasha: Feudal Combat

Year/Type: Aug. 2005/Fighting
Developer/Publisher: Bandai
System: PS2, GC

Which came first? The anime

Preview: The latest mainstream anime to intoxicate the nation's 'toon-aholics, *InuYasha*, like *Dragon Ball Z*, features a bottomless pit of episodes revolving around a simple premise: InuYasha, a demon freed by (now sidekick) Kagome—a cute high school girl with serious archery skills—seeks to eliminate those who bound him, namely his arch nemesis Naraku. And what better way to do so than via buttery versus fighting?! *Story Mode* lets players control InuYasha, Miroku and/or Sango, Sesshomaru or Shippo in character-specific story-driven versus combat; *Mission Mode* lets you drop in on areas around the map for specific ops (very cool); and the *versus Battle Mode* lets you choose your partner or go solo, selecting from 14 characters to hone and develop your skills. While I prefer the zaniness of *One Piece*, I have to admit this is a tight, extremely well-made fighter that's miles better than any *Dragon Ball* game to date. The cell shading is as good as it gets and the battlegrounds vivid, interactive, and highly detailed.



MS Gundam Vs. Zeta Gundam

Year/Type: June 2005/Fighting

Developer/Publisher: Capcom/Bandai

System: PS2

Which came first? The anime

Review: Like so many Gundam battles before it, MS Vs. Zeta delivers fans the latest quiver of mobile suits to take into all manner of air and ground combat, shooting and slashing at massive mechs of all shapes and sizes, mixing it up against CPU opponents or real-life humans in arcade mode. The attraction here is definitely in the option to choose a side—AEUG or Titans—and fight to different ends, along with (for the first time) transformable Zeta suits (it's a nod from Macross there) to tilt the odds in aerial combat. Otherwise, this is familiar territory, with the playability and outcome of each match dependent on the suit and weapons you choose, along with how familiar you are with the specifics of Gundam-style combat. The emphasis (visually) is definitely on the Mobile Suits (there are over 50), as the backgrounds and especially explosions are pretty underwhelming. . . standard issue for a Capcom-developed fighter, as they tend to focus more on the mechanics than the environments. If you're into Gundam fighters, you'll be right at home.



MS Gundam Seed: Never Ending Tomorrow

Year/Type: August 2005 Action

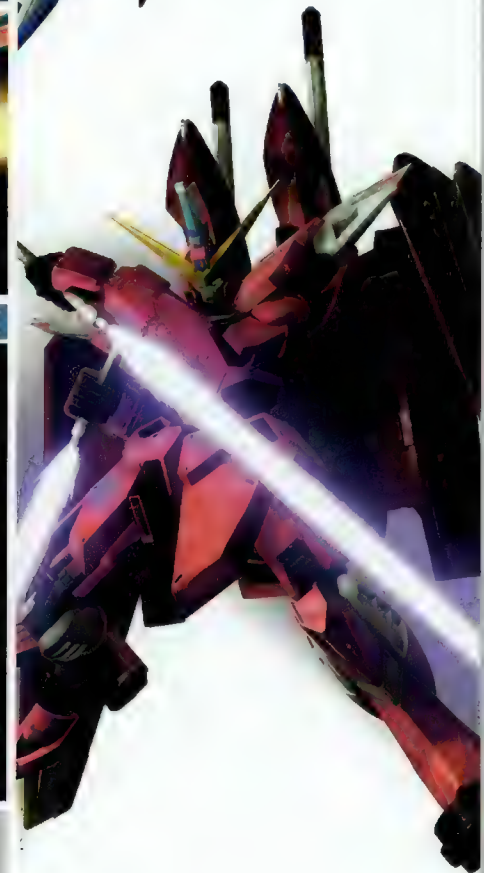
Developer/Publisher: BEC/Bandai

System: PS2

Which came first? The anime

Preview: The best thing to happen to Gundam-kind since M.S. 08th, Gundam Seed is being transformed into a game. . . and it is not, I repeat, not just another Gundam versus battle game. Rather, NET readies 50 mobile suits to be piloted within story, mission and (okay) versus modes in 3D air-to-ground assaults complete with an optional partner, a bevy of upgradeable weaponry and 40+ minutes of movie-quality cutscenes pulled directly from the series.

How's the anime? Among the very best of the never-ending stream of episodes (and movies) the brand has produced, which, if you sat down to watch end-to-end, would cause you to expire in the process.



play anime



Mirage of Blaze

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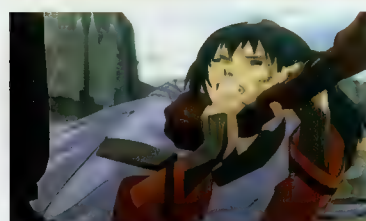
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We're not in the 16th century anymore



"...nothing short of an event for series anime fans..."



Akira Kurosawa's 1954 *The Seven Samurai* isn't just revered; it's one of the most influential films ever made, considered by many the precursor for the entire samurai genre. If FUNimation's retelling did no more than bring more people to it, that would be a noble endeavor, but fortunately that won't be the case.

While nothing could match the intensity of the action and human drama of Kurosawa's original, massive hovering monoliths, flying fortresses and giant mechs—though strange bedfellows for the source material—are fitting replacements to tell the tale. The "bandits" in this case—pillaging small villages for their hard-earned rice and livestock—arrive in the form of massive armadas—extreme overkill for such paltry rewards, but pillaging is just the tip of a much larger iceberg. It is from their insolence, however, that their undoing is devised as the villagers decide to fight back and send three of their own to the city to trade their precious rice for the services of seven samurai willing to stand and fight.

For those familiar with the original story, the anime takes many liberties, as did the severely underrated game. The misdirection to save the child early on, for example, doesn't take place in the village, nor do they use the samurai-in-peasants' clothing ruse. The outcome is the same, but the set-up—adapted deftly for series anime by Gonzo—is as dissimilar as it could possibly be. There is much to be celebrated here; the opportunity to drink in this legendary tale adapted by Gonzo and localized by FUNimation is nothing short of an event for series anime fans or anyone looking for a compelling way to spend their leisure time. *Dave Halverson*

Samurai 7

Score

9.5

Volume 1

Score

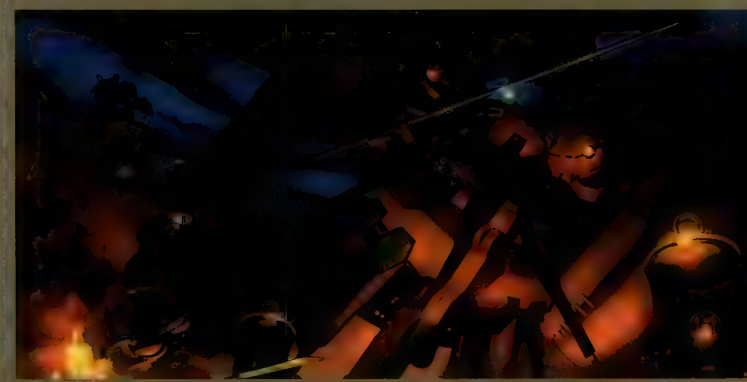
9.5

A spectacular benchmark film recreated in spectacular animated form...

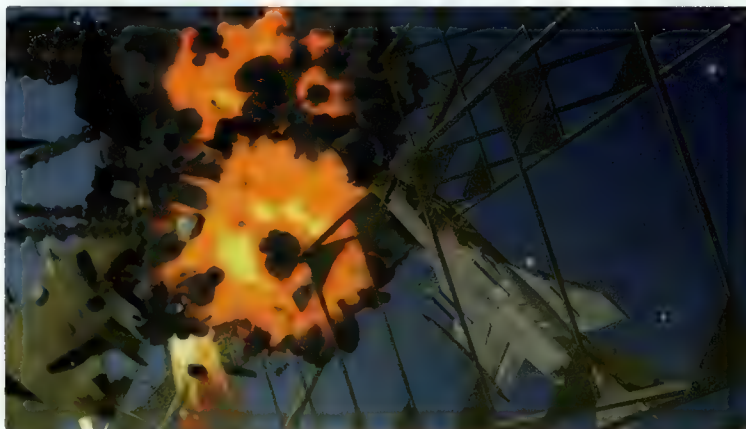
Hasn't a bone to pick, but the series is young.

Released by: FUNimation Rating: 13 and up

Running Time: 100 minutes Available: August 23



Seems like a bit of overkill to steal people's rice...



Area 88

Volume: 1 - "Treacherous Skies"

Released by: ADV Films Rating: TV PG Running Time: 75 minutes Available: July 19

Camerasman Shinjou may be a jerk, but he's a jerk who you can really admire for his willingness to get the shot.

Spots of scenes resemble that choppy '80s G.I. Joe animation, oddly enough... And what's with the DDR-like soundtrack?

95
Score

Ever since Top Gun, we've never gotten enough aerial dogfighting to satiate our lust for it. Enter Area 88, secret mercenary airbase, home to freelance mercenary pilots who'll protect freedom... for a cost. Say they shoot down a bogey, that's 10 grand; ground target, \$1000 per hostile. If you make \$1.5 million, or serve three years, you can get out of the unit—unfortunately, gas, repairs, and even meals aren't free in this joint.

Ace war photographer Makoto Shinjou is given special permission to come on the base and snap away, though it's not always appreciated...especially when he smarts off to provoke his subject to get the shot he needs. Everyone on the base has a story, from the young Hindi pilot to the good-natured buzzard of a sky jockey,

but it's Japanese pilot Shin that Makoto's interested in shooting...for as-yet-unknown reasons.

As a remake of the OVA from some 20 years ago, the show still retains the neo-classic look of the original, even channeling the look of Robotech's Rick Hunter into Shin, blonde bangs and all. Even within the first few episodes, the character development flourishes, and the CG dogfights, while not entirely crystal clear as to where everyone is in proximity to each other, offer giddy thrills of speed and missile streams. Yukikaze fans will find familiar ground with Area 88, but maybe it's high time others got back into the 'pit for a little rock 'n' roll action. Just leave the Iron Eagle soundtrack on the shelf, okay?

Jim Dewey



A war-ravaged country recovers from the brink of collapse. Scores of villages are terrorized by the Nobuseri. But the Nobuseri are no normal bandits.

Akira Kurosawa's SAMURAI 7

FUNIMATION
ENTERTAINMENT
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GONZO

available on DVD
August 23, 2005

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Steamboy

Fun of hot air

I watch a lot of anime—a ton even, many of which I can't imagine going through life having not seen (ie, anime is special, blah, blah, blah), but it isn't often, maybe two or three times a decade, I get to marvel at the craft, standing in awe of every passing frame. *Steamboy* took seven years to make...seven years...but the result makes the likes of *Shrek* and *Madagascar* look like old, flat-shaded polygons; it's simply a wonder of the world...to look at.

By now, most of you know that this is a film by *Akira* creator Katsuhiro Otomo, and so one expects it to be visually astounding. Give Otomo and company \$27 million to work with (which, by Japanese standards, is equivalent to Cameron's titanic *Titanic* budget) and they'll move mountains. The real kicker, or in this case not, is that he chose a Victorian-era turn of the century sci-fi piece to spend all those years on; all of a sudden he's Jules Verne. Science this, technology that... The plot is not only a familiar one, but it's run its course—at least in the U.S.—about small-minded men and the technology they would squander to gain money and power rather than create

something to enrich peoples lives. On one end of the spectrum we have Lloyd, the elder Steam, played exceedingly well by Patrick Stewart; on the other, his (preachy) son Eddie, played by Alfred Molina; and in the middle, the grandson Eddie, aka Steamboy (played by Anna Paquin, but it totally works), whom we'll refer to as keeper of the ball. Like Dr. Lizardo's over-thruster, without a single, tiny, iron ball, the whole WMD is just a city-sized paper-weight, and so the battle is on to control the steam ball.

The journey, visual, whatever you want to call it, is, in a word, magnificent, but given it's only maybe 20 percent traditional animation, it should be. And although contrived, the story does have its moments...until we discover what granddad wanted to do with the "steam castle," which proves the lot of them complete lunatics and the audience mere rubbernecks. There's no bad guy here, just two sides of power-mongers and a crazy old coot in the middle that we all hope go up in a ball of flame. That said (and *Akira* changed my life), *Steamboy* is a film everyone should see at least



So the story is shallow and preachy...but my god, it's beautiful.

once...the sad part being that to even begin to grasp *Akira*, you had to watch it five times, and did so gladly. Otomo set the bar so high, not even he can reach it. Dave Halverson

Steamboy

Movie

8.0

Score

One of the most stunning films I have ever seen, matched only by Rintaro's Metropolis.

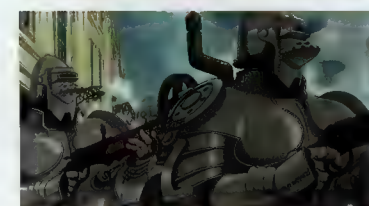
It's no Akira. Story is predictable and worn. This could just have easily been a live action film.

Released by: Columbia TriStar

Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 126 minutes

Available: July



"The journey, visual, whatever you want to call it, is, in a word, magnificent..."

My Beautiful Girl, Mari

Movie

Released by: ADV Films Rating: TV G Running Time: 78 minutes Available: July

It really takes you back to that one summer we've all had that you'll never forget. A true love letter for the season.
Minor odd plot holes and an all-too-short trip to the fantasy world keep this from being downright perfect.

9.0
Score



Ah, a boy's summer. A time for exploration, being lazy and casual alternative reality-hopping. Bwah?! Yep. You heard right. Nam-Woo and Jun-Ho, best friends in a little Korean town, are ready for another idyllic time off from school. Jun Ho, the bespectacled one, is dealing with departing for a new school at the end of it, while Nam-Woo copes with his cranky grandmother and a would-be boyfriend of his mother, not ready yet to deal with his father being gone.

While hunting through a bin of marbles one day, Nam-Woo finds one that looks like it has the reflection of someone in it, only to lose it in the shuffle. Then, while hunting for his missing cat at the old lighthouse, an aqua-colored...floaty-thing appears and leads him to the top, where in a flash of brilliant light, he and his cat are sent hurtling into a flora-enriched world with 50-foot-tall pink shaggy dogs that walk among the clouds and a fur-covered, albino-haired girl who never says a word.

Jun-Ho naturally doesn't believe Nam-Woo's story upon his return, until one night of a terrible storm where Jun-Ho's father's ship is in danger of crashing on the reefs, and the boys need to try the sparkling marbles' luminescence to light the way... with wholly unexpected results.

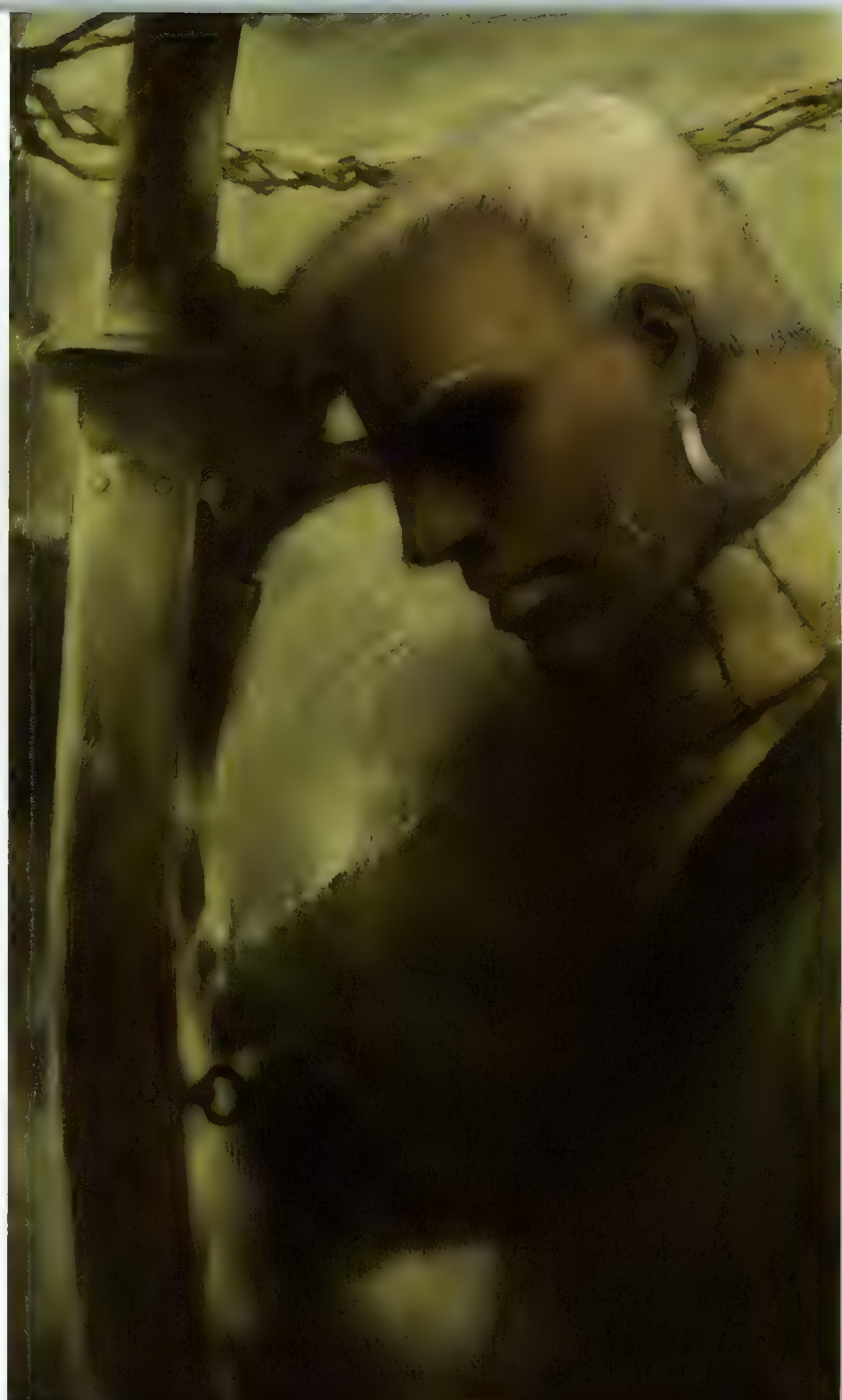
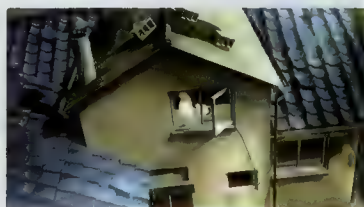
Honestly? I had no idea what to expect

when I sat down with this, knowing nothing more than the title. Watching it, you gain a sense that this easily could have been shot as a live-action film, since most of the story takes place in the real world—not to mention the paint-like animation is rotoscoped (animation over live action) for the human characters. The Miyazaki influence runs deep, from cute, bloated characters to the look of Mari's fuzzy "outfit" to the fantastical world Nam-Woo lands himself in.

The film's plot is slight, which isn't a bad thing so much; some voices seem age-miscast for the dub track. How Mari's name is learned is a mystery, since she remains mute the entire film—which also leaves me puzzled as to why Nam-Woo falls for her so quickly despite any real interaction, nor logging any substantial time in her world. Even the title feels like a misnomer, much like *Princess Mononoke*, since both namesakes are far from the focus of their respective films.

It's still a delightful effort, never heavy-handed; ADV should be applauded for diving into the untapped Korean animation field and bringing back such fare. By the time this ode to summer ends, you'll feel like maybe you should go outside and experience your own adventure for a change. Jim Dewey

"...a flora-enriched world with 50-foot-tall pink shaggy dogs that walk among the clouds..."



Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and the Nobuseri's reign of terror is increasing its hold on the countryside.

Akira Kurosawa's

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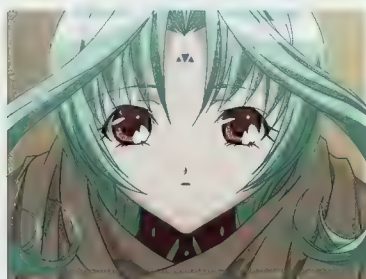
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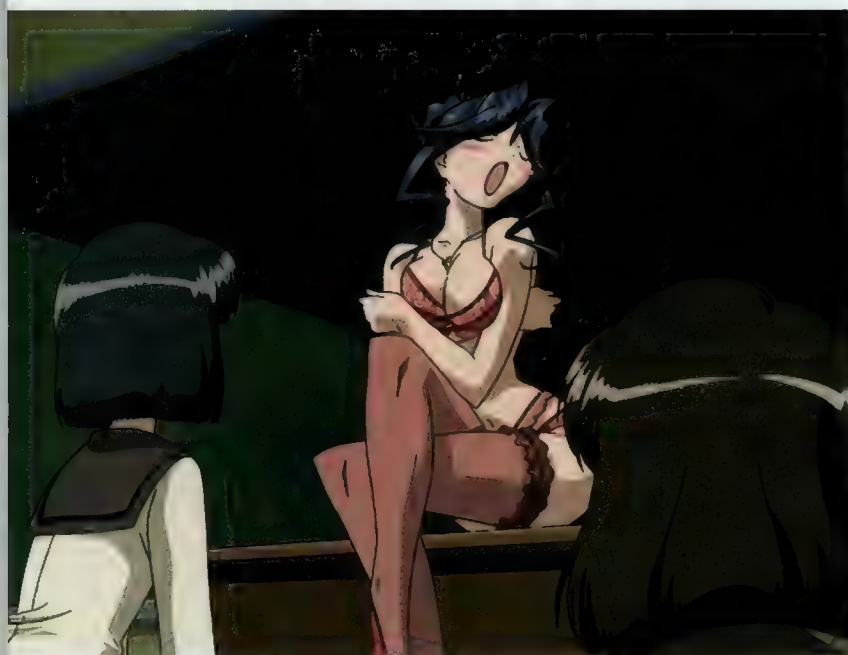
DearS

My favorite naked Martian



Are you ready for yet another innocuous humanoid hottie to stumble into a complete brain donor's life? Is this premise not beaten to a bleeding pulp? Apparently not, as yet another steamy manga makes the transition to anime, mammaries in ample tow. The humanoid in this case is actually an alien, or DearS (meaning "beloved friend"), 150 of which dropped into Tokyo out of deep space in their UFO one year prior and have since been granted full citizenship. They are so beautiful, so perfect in every sense of the word, that they are revered throughout Japan, yet we happen to drop in on Kunara Takeya: a guy whose most meaningful relationships after 17 years wasting oxygen has been with dating sims and porn. His closest friends would kill to touch a DearS (one is actually transferring to their school, where the homeroom teacher is such a nymph she strips in class and rubs freshmen's faces in her huge ta-tas,

"Is this premise not beaten to a bleeding pulp? Apparently not..."



Above...that's their home room teacher. I hope I come back as a Japanese high school student.



so get ready), yet when Takeya finds an "un-programmed" one in the bushes (she fell off a truck, no less) who instantly bonds with him, all he can do is scold it and dwell on paranoid delusions that there's something gooey inside. Like, who wouldn't sample the goods and find out?! Enough with these fools! In this case, there is a sinister element in the offering (isn't there always when invaders, er, aliens are involved?) and it is cheeky as hell, so what the hell; I'm in. Dave Halverson

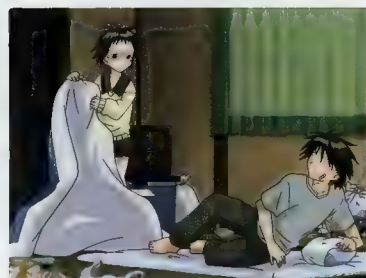
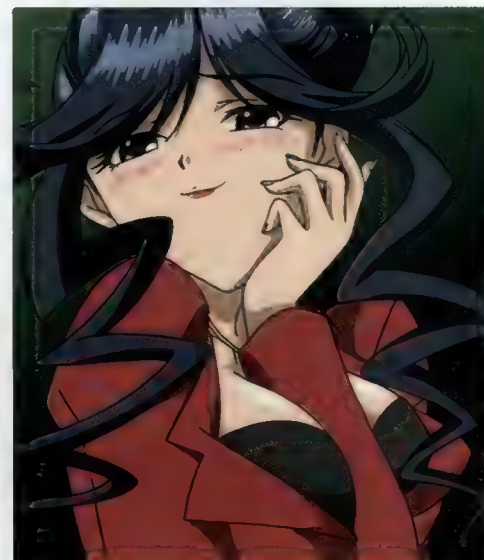
DearS 7.5 Score

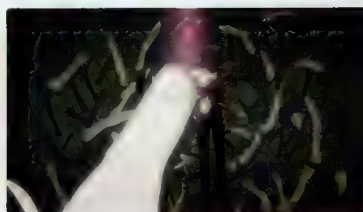
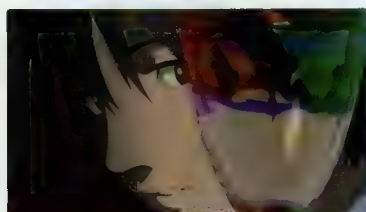
Volume: 1 - "1st Contact"

Fan service so good you'll want to leave a tip.

We've been down this road so many times it's closed for repairs.

Released by: Geneon Entertainment **Rating:** 16 and up
Running Time: 100 minutes **Available:** August





Le Portrait De Petite Cossette

OVA

Released by: Geneon Entertainment Rating: 16 and up Running Time: 107 minutes Available: September

Aniplex has done it again—their best OVA since the original *Read Or Die*. Sheer visual bliss.

Eiri's willingness to die for the sake of *Summertime* gives for a OVA he hardly knows is a bit...unwise.

8.5
Score

Gothic Lolita fans, your OVA title has come—and Cossette is your savior. Playing the role of martyr for this tale is young antiques shop employee and artist Eiri Kurahaschi, who finds the demure, tiny Cossette when looking through a beautiful Venetian wine glass, and becomes intrigued with who she is, despite her ability to make the glass overflow with blood for him to drink to become part of her world. Slowly Eiri begins to learn the fate of Cossette 250 years beforehand, and about the artist who painted her, and subsequently killed her and her family—and how that artist's evil spirit now apparently lies within him, reborn.

The imagery, Judeo-Christian symbolism notwithstanding, is a

sumptuous feast. The dynamic framing of the shots, the pastel colors, the spatter...er...gallons of blood...perfectly in tune with the material. However, the CG animation becomes embarrassing to watch; the quality is par to material from a decade ago. Eiri's bi-polar attitude towards accepting his unfair torture to suddenly having a bout of mortality is almost as confusing as the jump-cuts of the storytelling in places. Still, despite a plodding fluff second act simply for more bloodshed and suffering, the story starts and ends wickedly good. For material coming from the director and writer of *SoulTaker*, Cossette is in very good hands for this wildly underutilized genre—a big first step for such constrictive outfits. Jim Dewey

"...that artist's evil spirit now apparently lies within him, reborn."



But one group of villagers has had enough and decided to hire samurai for protection.

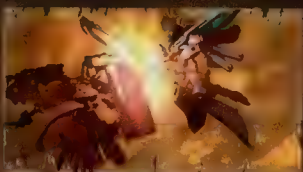
Akira Kurosawa's
SAAMURAI 7

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"Like the masterpiece it reinterprets,
Samurai 7 is a wildly entertaining, instant classic"
-Anime Insider

The Legendary Epic Reborn

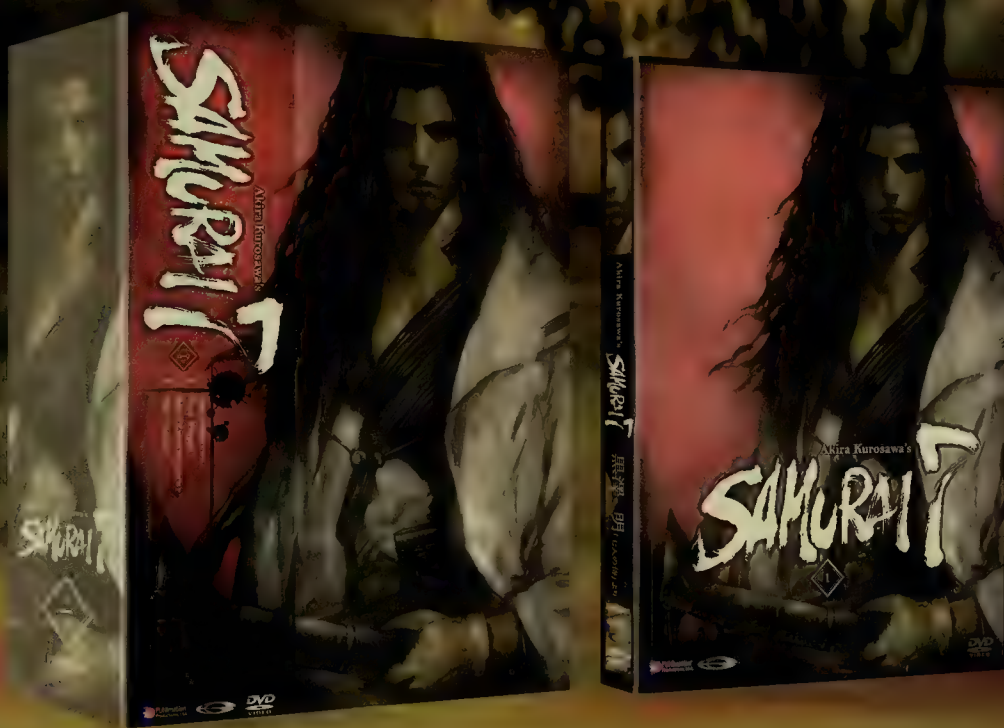
Based on the legendary Akira Kurosawa classic epic feature film, *Seven Samurai*.

Set in a futuristic world that has just witnessed the end of a massive war, scores of villages are terrorized by Nobuseri bandits. But the Nobuseri are no normal bandits. They were once Samurai, who during the war integrated their living cells with machines to become dangerous weapons now appearing more machine than man. Absolute power corrupts, and their reign of terror is increasing its hold on the countryside.



But one group of villagers has had enough, deciding to hire samurai to protect their village. Kirara is a young priestess who travels to the city seeking out protection. One by one, she encounters brave samurai that the war has left behind. These men of skill and valor are each unique and not without their quirks. But can they come together as one to defend the helpless village?

With its futuristic but rustic atmosphere, well-developed characters, incredible CG animation and high production value, *Samurai 7* is poised to be an instant classic.



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Released by: Geneon Music

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Satoshi Kon's Paranoia Agent OST

Released by: Geneon Music

Paranoia Agent is one of the top five anime soundtracks I've ever heard. The somber "Reverie Hill" will transport you, "Happiness" will uplift you, and the rest will make you happy you believed me.

Tenjho Tenge Great Disc 1

Released by: Geneon Music

For the supremely funky "Bomb A Head!" the powerful "Kyuu!" and all of its many shades in between, Great Disc 1 is requisite anime ST. Too bad the two "Dramas" are in Japanese though.

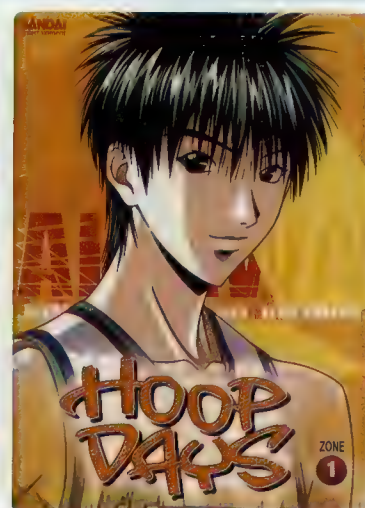
watch this



Patlabor: The Mobile Police: The New Files

Released by: Central Park Media Now Playing: Volume 1

After 47 TV episodes, 16 OVA episodes raised the bar for the Patlabor series in Japan... of which the first four are now available in volume one of *The New Files* from CPM here in the States. Mecha fans make a beeline!



Hoop Days

Released by: Bandai Entertainment Now Playing: Volume 1

Sports anime fans suffering from acute NBA playoff withdrawal syndrome may want to check out Bandai's *Hoop Days*, a comeback story with a big heart (and a smokin' girl's team on the side).

play this



Brave Soul

Released by: Peach Princess System: PC CD-Rom

Peach Princess' *Brave Soul* is the first true action-role-playing bishoujo game localized into English, combining old-school 16-bit style top-down action-role-playing with anime-style sexual situations... if you're 18 or older (or have really open-minded parents).

read this



Orphen

Released by: ADV Manga Now Reading: Volume 1

If you've played the PS2 game, you'll certainly appreciate the *Orphen* manga; but if you haven't played the game, the manga will surely plot your course to it... even if it is first-generation PS2. As game-related manga go, this is one of the very best.



Heat Guy J

Released by: Tokyopop Now Reading: Volume 1

Welcome to Jewde, where Daisuke Aurora and Heat Guy J do their best to keep the peace and keep on breathing in the process. You have to go a long way to find action/sci-fi anywhere near this stylized.



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NOW READING

the wonderful world of manga

Genshiken



Pub: Del Rey **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Comedy/Drama
Rating: 16 and older **Story and Art:** Kio Shimoku

Kanji Sasahara is like a person many of us (gamers and anime fans) know, and he's finally doing something about it by joining Genshiken: The Society for the Study of Modern Visual Culture (aka an otaku club), much to the dismay of Saki Kasukabe. She's trying to pull her cute boyfriend Kousaka out of fandom while Kanji is part of what's keeping him in... These are the type of guys who blurt out *Gundam* facts out of the blue... you gotta love 'em. There's a moment in V1 where Sasahara enters Kousaka's room... total classic.

Read it if: You're an aspiring or career geek, frequent cons, or just like to laugh.

Chrono Code



Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Sci-Fi
Rating: 13 and older **Story:** Eui-Cheol **Art:** Il-Ho Choi

Any manga that begins with a nun on a hover scooter deserves a read, but beware: Volume 1 of Chrono Code may cause your head to explode trying to follow it... But never fear, Volume 2 comes to the rescue. Chrono Code deals with a new world order, in which rule is divided into four Federations after a cataclysmic world war, and focuses on time travel—flashing back from 2274 to 1994 and somewhere in between—the origin of Chronoids (don't ask) and how brother and sister Yun-Hee and Yun-Woo find their way back to each other.

Read it if: You're a Mensa student looking for a challenge, like Kim Do, and like your sci-fi extra compelling.

Pilgrim Jäger



Publisher: Anime Works **Volume:** 2 **Genre:** Supernatural Fantasy
Rating: 13 and older **Story:** Toh Ubukata **Art:** Toh Ubukata

The first thing you'll notice about Pilgrim Jäger is Mami Itoh's extraordinary illustrations. But this book runs deep; in fact, if you're easily offended by the juxtaposing of sacred events—namely the rise of the Jesuits and the events surrounding that most famous of artists and servant of Rome, Michelangelo—well, then read it anyway. It's a fascinating account of Italian History, brilliantly told from, shall we say, a unique perspective. It's not every day you witness a friar spilling prophecy while burning at the stake.

Read it if: You like all things Gothic, the Renaissance, and/or have seen either of the last two Ridley Scott movies.

Deus Vitae



Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1-3 **Genre:** Sci-Fi
Rating: 16 and older **Art and Story:** Takuya Fujima

Someone call Verhoven! Deus Vitae—besides being among the most gorgeous manga I've ever seen—is as groomed for the big screen as sci-fi gets. Think *Battlefield Earth* with the Final Fantasy treatment. This time, humanity is fighting back against a master race, created by a computer built to protect humanity, but it extinguishes humanity instead and replaces us with "Leave," a master race of Selenoids, perfect humans free of any defects, ruled by four Blessed Mothers... But humanity isn't dead; it was just resting.

Read it if: You have a pulse.

No Man's Land



Pub: Seven Seas **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Adventure/Horror
Rating: Older Teen **Story:** Jason DeAngelis **Art:** Jennyson Rosero

John Parker rides into V1 a lot like a certain other undead hero, Brandon Heat, and packs a similar superiority in battle; however, his is an even more tortured existence. Parker reemerges as the ruthless hired gun No-Man after his family is murdered when he gets too close to unraveling a dark conspiracy. The setup may be cliché, but the follow-through is anything but, tying in everything from Abe Lincoln's assassination (Parker was his bodyguard and is implicated) to flesh-eating zombies in children's clothing.

Read it if: You fancy demon slaying, stories of revenge and old West-style bloodbaths (and don't mind getting a little on ya).

MBQ



Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Comedy
Rating: 16 and older **Art and Story:** Felipe Smith

I normally loathe the hip-hop manga, but this Felipe Smith is onto something. The boy plays too much GTA for sure, and obviously has a head for telling stories a la Tarantino, because MBQ V1 is divided into *Pulp Fiction*-like intersecting slices of inner-city life with extra helpings of: violence, sex, karaoke, the "Cops" (one in particular that already deserves a spin-off), a struggling artist, fast food and really, really nasty old ladies. This big-city tale manages to hit home without being overtly rap or thug, replacing the usual clichés with real characters.

Read it if: You like *Chappelle Show*-style raunchy comedy, and/or sex and violence... ie, welcome, America!

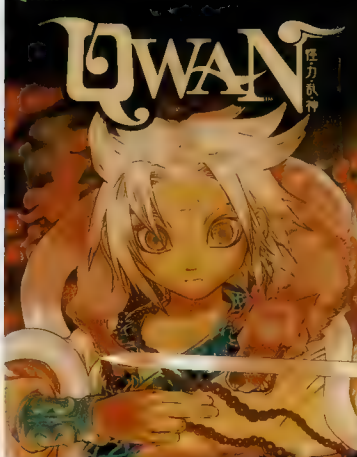
Gacha Gacha



Publisher: Del Rey **Coming in:** August **Genre:** Comedy
Rating: 16 and older **Story and Art:** Hiroyuki Yamashita

Among the next big things from Del Rey is Gacha Gacha, about your typical Japanese high school student... usually late, loves beef bowls, pals around with a crew... and (of course) is enduring his first crush. But before Kouhei can express his feelings for his childhood sweetie Kurara, she flies off to Hawaii with her mom for vacation (sounds like a Jon Cusack film, I know, but stay with me) and returns as a seemingly completely different person... because she is. Where Kurara thought boys still had cooties, her new alter ego can't get enough of them, so Kouhei's got quite a quandary on—and in—his hands. Wait, I think this was a Jon Cusack movie.

Qwan



Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Fantasy
Rating: 13 and older **Story and Art:** Aki Shimizu

Whilst a lowlife gorges on offerings left for the dead, he's struck by a tiny, headless four-legged cherub that's plummeted from the sky. Soon after, he's approached by a boy who claims it's his and wants it back. The lowlife, thinking it's rare and of value, of course refuses... Later, at the local tavern, the lowlife is fingered, and since someone has died since, blamed for it and strung up. Looks like Qwan is going to get his pet back, as soon as he inhales the demon tiger with the human head trying to eat the bum on a rope. And so begins this peculiar partnership.

Read it if: You like your mysticism with a dose of wit.

BEST SELLING MANGA

- 01 Fruits Basket Vol. 9 Tokyopop
- 02 D.N. Angel Vol. 8 Tokyopop
- 03 Rurouni Kenshin Vol. 15 VIZ
- 04 Vampire Hunter D: Dark Horse/Digital Manga
- 05 FullMetal Alchemist Vol. 1 VIZ

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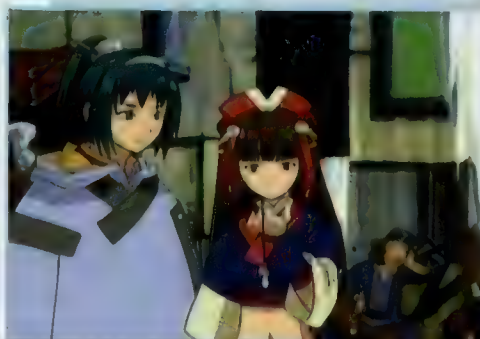
Virgin Megastore Top Ten

- 01 **Steamboy** columbia tristar
- 02 **Appleseed** geneon entertainment
- 03 **Lupin The 3rd: Island of Assassins** funimation
- 04 **Elfen Lied** adv films
- 05 **FullMetal Alchemist** funimation productions
- 06 **Paranoia Agent** geneon entertainment
- 07 **Burst Angel** funimation productions
- 08 **Gilgamesh** adv films
- 09 **Ninja Scroll Ultimate Edition** urban vision
- 10 **Samurai Champloo** geneon entertainment



Play Magazine Top Ten

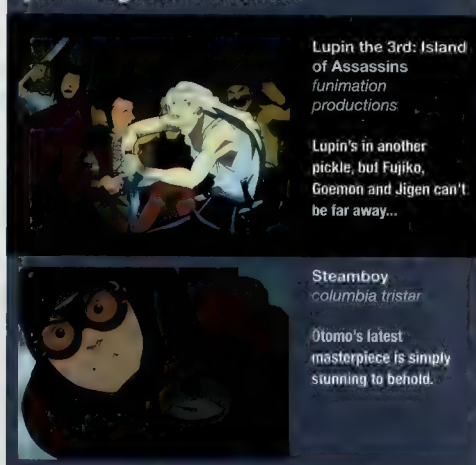
- 01 **Samurai 7** funimation productions
- 02 **Samurai Champloo** geneon entertainment
- 03 **Gilgamesh** adv films
- 04 **Tenjho Tenge** geneon entertainment
- 05 **Burst Angel** funimation productions
- 06 **Area 88** adv films
- 07 **Steamboy** columbia tristar
- 08 **Full Metal Panic Fumoffu** adv films
- 09 **GANTZ** adv films
- 10 **Elfen Lied** adv films



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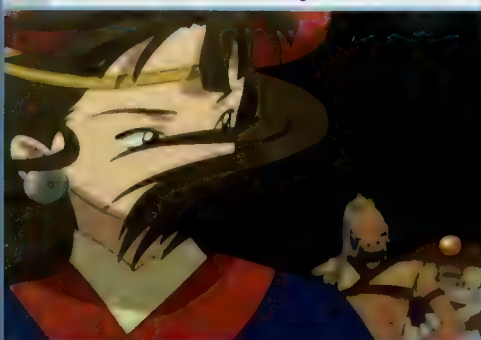


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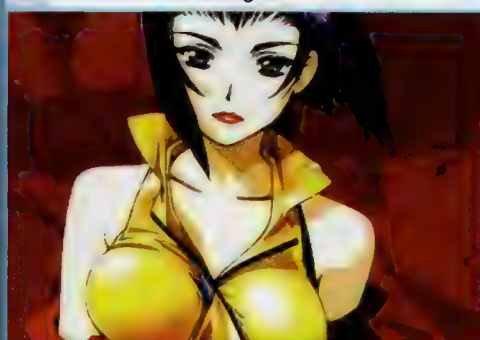
Dave Halverson

- 01 **Samurai 7** funimation productions
- 02 **Burst Angel** funimation productions
- 03 **Steamboy** columbia tristar
- 04 **Samurai Champloo** geneon entertainment
- 05 **Ghost in the Shell: SAC** manga entertainment



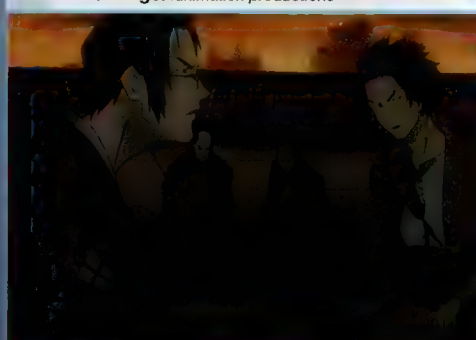
Jim Dewey

- 01 **Cowboy Bebop Remix** bandai entertainment
- 02 **Cromartie High School** adv films
- 03 **Area 88** adv films
- 04 **Gankutsuou** geneon entertainment
- 05 **Shrine of the Morning Mist** media blasters



Nelson Lui

- 01 **Samurai Champloo** geneon entertainment
- 02 **Grenadier** media blasters
- 03 **Jubei Chan 2** geneon entertainment
- 04 **Melody of Oblivion** geneon entertainment
- 05 **Burst Angel** funimation productions



Readers' Anime Top Five

- 01 **Samurai Champloo** geneon entertainment
- 02 **Appleseed** geneon entertainment
- 03 **FullMetal Alchemist** funimation productions
- 04 **Ghost in the Shell: SAC** manga entertainment
- 05 **Gantz** adv films

Play Magazine Manga Top Five

- 01 **Pilgrim Jäger** anime works
- 02 **Legends From Darkwood** antarctic press
- 03 **iD_eNTITY** tokyopop manga
- 04 **Heaven Above Heaven** tokyopop manga
- 05 **Volcano High** media blasters press

Play Magazine Music Top Five

- 01 **Paranoia Agent OST** geneon anime music
- 02 **Tenjho Tenge** geneon anime music
- 03 **Samurai Champloo - Katana** geneon anime music
- 04 **L'Arc-en-Ciel - AWAKE** tofu records
- 05 **T.M. Revolution - Vertical Infinity** tofu records

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Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story Unrated

Starring: Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn, Christine Taylor, Rip Torn
Directed by: Rawson Marshall Thurber
Released By: Fox Home Entertainment
Rated: Unrated

When some DVDs say "unrated," they don't *really* mean it...we get a discarded line here a naughty bit there...but no real added value. Such is not the case with *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story Unrated*, which has been recklessly re-cut to offend the fat, the weak and the ugly even more so than the original, which already stands as one of the best comedies ever about rival gymnasiums. It's the *Used Cars* of our time, and I'm a better man for having watched it again, along with its informative extras, including but not limited to deleted scenes, added commentary and dirty dancing. The story, about Global Gym—a massive



quasi-cultural facility run by a maniacal freak—trying to hostilely acquire its adjacent rival Average Joes—"a skidmark on the underpants of society"—and turn it into a parking lot, couldn't be any funnier or more timely in this age of augmentation gone awry. It may not turn you from Frankenstein to Franken-fine, but you'll certainly feel a little prettier when the fat man sings. Dave Halverson

Season: A- **Extras:** B+



Roughnecks: Starship Troopers Chronicles - The Complete Campaigns

Starring: Rino Romano, Elizabeth Daily, Rider Strong, Jamie Hanes, Tish Hicks (voices)
Director: Chris Berkley, Alan Caldwell, etc.
Released By: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment
Rated: PG

Roughnecks: Starship Troopers Chronicles is executive produced by Paul Verhoven, but you'd never know it. It so lacks his punch, his excessive use of force and spectacle; even the theme song is weak, droning like an old flute behind each opening sequence, and the propaganda that made the film has but disappeared.

But the series isn't all bad, even if Ibanez is a fat, poorly rendered cow. All of the humans are poorly modeled—their movements remind me of the *Thunderbirds* puppets—but thankfully "The Bug," select alien species, the hardware, organics, mecha and assault suits all echo the Heinlein novel's gritty feel. The stories are pretty much of the canned made-for-TV variety, but a bug hunt's a bug hunt; if you like the sci-fi, this is still a worthwhile box, and at times the episodes really shine. *Starship Troopers* deserved a proper sequel, but in lieu of that I'll take what I can get, even if it does look like console CGI. We've certainly come a long way in a short time. Dave Halverson

Movie: B- **Extras:** C+



Dark Water

Starring: Hitomi Kuroki, Rio Kanno
Director: Hideo Nakata
Released By: ADV Films
Rated: PG-13

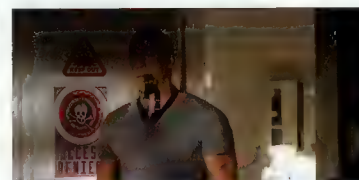
Directed by Hideo Nakata, whose superior *Ringu* became the inspiration for the creepy American hit *The Ring*, this psychologically driven attempt at horror is as much incoherent melancholy as it is chilling horror. *Dark Water* tells a bear-bones story of a mother and her kindergarten daughter dealing with the loss and confusion of a recent divorce. With her ex-husband still defiantly in the picture, Yoshimi (Hitomi Kuroki) struggles to find work while she and her daughter take up new residence in a decayed apartment building. The movie is moodily filmed in somber tones of hazy blues and greens, morosely paced as we are introduced to increasingly ominous images of falling rain and collecting puddles as the rickety apartment leaks—mostly from the growing stain in the bedroom ceiling. This is apparently frightening, because the music informs us so, and the strange characters all around seem to be in on something we're not and, well, we know it's a horror film going in. Once the mystery of a missing girl enters the picture, her haunting presence would seem to lead to more coming shocks, but by the final act, we're left with a strained maternal theme that leaves the thread-bare characters begging for more of a movie. I can see how *Dark*

The Pacifier

Starring: Vin Diesel, Faith Ford, Brad Garrett
Director: Adam Shankman
Released By: Disney Home Entertainment
Rated: PG

After the atrocious, beyond bad, PG-rated mess that is *The Pacifier*, there are officially no clichés left in the world. This movie isn't just bad, it's scary bad—the kind of bad you really have to work at. I mean, when bad TV actors even look bad...watch out. Brad Garrett should disappear. When it's not cliché—troubled youth reformed by abrasive-come-loving role model, anyone?—it's just stupid; skilled ninjas always crash recklessly through a closed window when the guy they're after is in plain sight. Hello? This film about—ah hell, who cares?—some SEAL bozo that has to watch some kids 'cause he got their dad killed saving him...it's just crap. They should run the film's token sappy makes-me-wanna-puke montage in film schools as a plea to never make another. Vin, Vin, Vin...has it all gone so awry? You're Riddick...Xander Cage even. You darted on xXx for this? Dave Halverson

Movie: F **Extras:** D



Water was tapped for the upcoming American remake this summer; it contains interesting components ripe for a more complete picture. Brady Fletcher

Movie: C **Extras:** N/A





Interview Howard Shore

The Shining Symphony

A corona of sound to guide your sword.

Words Mike Griffin

He's won Oscars, Golden Globes and Grammys for some of the biggest soundtracks in movie history. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Aviator*, *Seven*, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Gangs of New York* are among his best-known scores, while the cognoscenti will appreciate his subtle work with David Cronenberg in *The Fly*, *Existenz*, and currently *A History of Violence*. Howard Shore is one of the most revered composers on the planet today.

Korean MMO powerhouse Webzen (Huxley, APB) is set to explode on the scene in North America, and it has procured Howard Shore's musical talents for the epic symphonic soundtrack of its forthcoming online action RPG, *SUN*. We pulled the ever-gracious Howard away from his whirlwind schedule for a few *SUN* soundtrack inquiries.

Right: Howard's *Lord of the Rings* concert series players, Moscow's National Philharmonic, joined him to record *SUN*'s soundtrack.



SUN

play: When did Webzen first approach you regarding *SUN*, and what was your initial reaction to the concepts they introduced?

Howard Shore: Webzen approached me in the summer of 2004, and I thought the game had a wonderfully detailed design and concept.

Which orchestra participated in the recording process, and have you worked with these players in the past?

I conducted a concert of the *Lord of the Rings* Symphony in November 2004 in Moscow with the National Philharmonic and the Choral Arts Society. At this time I was composing the music for *SUN*, and I also wanted to write a piece for this orchestra and chorus. After the Moscow concert, I took the orchestra and chorus to Tokyo for three concerts at the Forum. I decided then to record with this group that I had been working with and have the chorus sing in ancient Korean to express the world of *SUN*. It seemed like a perfect opportunity to bring together the Western and Eastern concepts of the game.

Did you have to adjust your studio techniques to accommodate a game music production environment?

I used a lot of the same techniques in pre-production for the game that I have developed for films. At the time of recording, however, the techniques used were specific to this particular theatre. I am constantly adjusting to accommodate the acoustics and the physics of a theatre.

"It seemed like a perfect opportunity to bring together the Western and Eastern concepts of the game."

Post-production, editing and mixing were very similar to my approach to films.

How did *SUN*'s theme and visual style influence the core direction of the music?

The music was composed to express the world of *SUN* on a few different levels:

to reflect the cities, the characters, the battlefields and the overarching themes of triumph and siege.

Now that you've completed the project, how do you feel game soundtrack production differs from film soundtrack work?

In terms of music composition, there is very little difference writing to the ideas of a game versus a film, even for a fantasy world. I am still creating imagery in music...the mirror of the world.

Can we expect more game scores in the future from Howard Shore?

Yes. **play**



BACK OF THE BOOK

Blah, blah, blah



When a game just isn't a game...

So, it's just a video game, huh?

To someone on the outside looking in, what we do can be a foreign oddity, a geek side show where the main attraction is as enticing as a street performer begging for money. We pass the time indulging our basest senses, numbly laying waste to mechanically conceived monsters and villains and pretty much anything that gets in the way of victory—anything and everything conceived to destroy and kill us back.

Is it so simple? On the surface, you can't deny the crude reflection of what we spend hours of our week lost to. The intellectual commitment is empty once the experience is over, but what about the moment we are connected to the game world? What exactly is going on that is perhaps even a little profound?

I'll never forget comments my good nongaming friend said years ago, curiously observing me playing *Final Fantasy III*. In that typically amused outsiders tone, he said he'd never seen anyone so consumed in such an unusual manner, remaining quiet, staring at a fixed object for so long, barely blinking, showing little sign of emotion. It was as if, he said, my mind was gone, carried away to an almost dream-state, and I had no awareness of the reality outside the virtual one that was gobbling up my imagination.

Certainly our minds are far from gone. There is something quite powerful going on when a great game has us in its hold, but exactly what that is could be as far reaching as distilling the tangible affect praying or meditating has on our senses (fascinating that prayer induces measurable responses in the brain). The academic study behind games is unfortunately limited, and what is there has no vision beyond the introductory.

Games are interactive, we are communicating our thoughts through digital currents, and they are responding

back, their worlds comprised of amazingly complex patterns of 1s and 0s coalescing into remarkably complex scenarios. It's an interactive dance of the human and the artificial. Read a book, watch a movie, observe a painting, hear the note of a guitar, and you are not actively providing feedback beyond the release of emotion. Could there be something to games that reaches beyond what we normally conceive them to be?

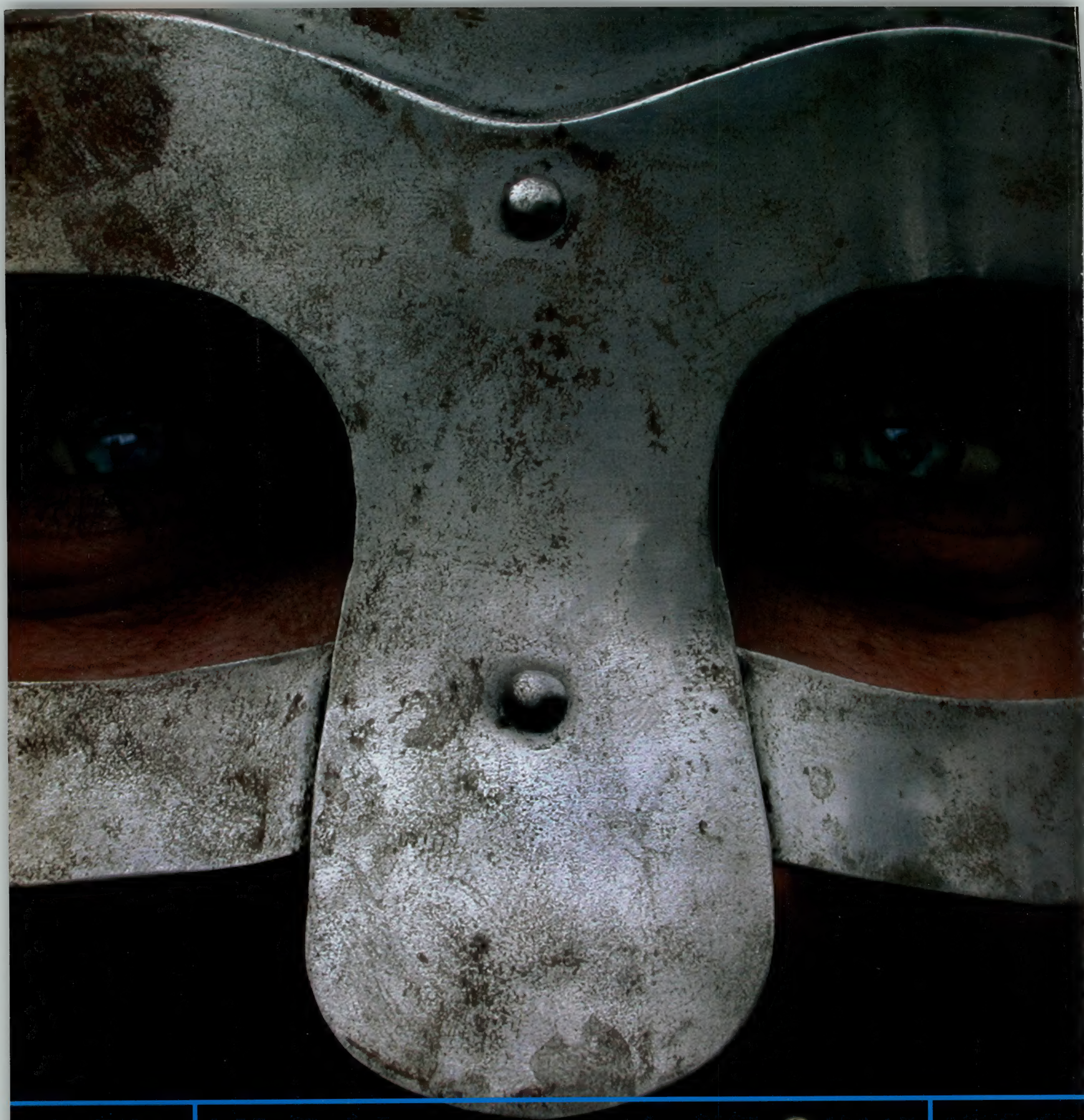
That there doesn't need to be an answer is partly the point, and partly the beauty of the experience of enjoying a game. You can call it escapist entertainment, but I would argue there can be so much more to it. There is a subconscious jacking in to a game world that becomes a malleable part of the person. And so much of this extends well beyond the obsession of mechanics and gameplay details and into the more ineffable mystery that games provide. An effect of any great art is that the individual defines the exact points of the experience, and in games, you are defining that experience by actually manipulating it in almost infinitely complex ways!

We're coming up to some pretty remarkable advancements in hardware technology, which will afford the possibilities of entirely new levels of expression. But even take the idea way back to the more primitive beginning

of games. In an email exchange I had with Eric-Jon Rossel Waugh, a writer for insertcredit.com, he offered an interesting take on the simpler classics and how the game world can be viewed. "Asteroids and Centipede have their own things to say that become most clear when you look at what they do to you—how they expect you to interact with them. You, in effect, are reaching out and touching the gameworld with your bullets, and in the process of doing so you're changing the very nature of the world. Just by being there, really. That's kind of significant."

Now take that communication into modern gaming, where these worlds are vast and expansive, filled with life and endlessly spontaneous cause and effect. Significant begins to spider-web into remarkable directions like the spark of a computer chip bursting into an entire matrix of possibilities. How your mind chooses to interact with the program is what takes it beyond the technical and into the emotional core of the experience. Games still may be dumb on the outside, but you really have to wonder: what happens when a literate range of emotion is poured into the foundation, when technology affords life-like realism that can't be separated from the world we live in? That question and how you react to the experience of games is entirely yours. Brady Fiechter

"Could there be something to games that reaches beyond what we normally conceive them to be?"



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1960 AD

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↑ 2005 AD

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